

THE
LONDON READER
of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

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No. 1279.—VOL. L.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING NOVEMBER 5, 1887.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



["YOU HAVE BEEN PLAYING TRUANT, ELSIE," MARION SAID. "WHAT MADE YOU COME HERE ALONE?"]

DRIVEN TO WRONG.

CHAPTER X.

THE ACME OF COMBINATION.

As soon as Mr. Gresham left the doctor's house he returned to the Rectory, where he had now settled himself comfortably in the rooms assigned to him, and exchanged his clerical costume for evening dress, which suited him admirably; and as he stood before the cheval-glass surveying himself, he was perfectly aware of the fact.

The tasseled hat was left on the peg in the hall, and one commonly known as a "billy-cock" was assumed, and with a dust coat over his fine black cloth, and white front, he walked rapidly up the village.

"John," said the doctor's wife, as she looked out of the window; "who is this coming?" and Dr. King obediently joined her.

"Why, the parson, of course!" he said,

decidedly; "only he has got rid of his long tails!"

"Dear me! how odd of him!" she answered, with a bewildered look.

"Odd! why! you didn't think he slept in that coat, did you, wife? Mr. Gresham is evidently a man of the world, and I think he'll astonish the natives here. The only question in my mind is, how Mr. Hilhouse came to engage him; they're as different as light from darkness, and can have no opinions in common."

"I need not ask which represents which," answered Mrs. King. "Mr. Gresham is a very agreeable man."

"Very."

"Don't you like him, John?" she asked, in surprise.

"Like him! of course I do; he's thoroughly pleasant, and will soon have all the parish dancing to his tunes; my only fear is, whether he is not too smooth to be sincere."

"Oh! I think he's sincere," returned the little woman, contentedly; "and how much he seemed to like Rosie."

"Perhaps," replied the doctor, dubiously;

"but it didn't strike me he was fond of children."

"There I am sure you are mistaken, John," said the wife and mother, warmly.

"All right, my dear, we'll say he is, by all means; don't get hot over it, there's a dear soul."

"Hot! why should I?" she answered, calming down. "Mr. Gresham is no especial friend of mine, but I thought him very nice."

"So did I, almost too nice, like the good stuff on the top of a wedding cake. He's an eminently agreeable man."

"Well, I'm blessed!" exclaimed Mr. Jenkins, watching Mr. Gresham up the street, as he drew his buxom wife to the window to look at him.

"The parson's a regular buck! he's got a wardrobe and a half, three suits already! rather a change after the rector's rusty old togs. Mr. Gresham, he'll set us all going the right way in Market Glenton."

"He *do* look nice," said Mrs. Jenkins, admiringly. "There'll be broken hearts in the parish before he goes out of it, Jenkins—you

see if there ain't. If I was a girl I don't say as I shouldn't fancy him myself!"

"Well, it's fortunate for me you're not!" retorted the landlord, good-naturedly. "And let's hope he'll make up to Miss Marion—she deserves it; she's a good lass."

"She is; but there! men are so perverse; he's sure not to take to her, because people wants him to. Who knows but that his fancy may be for Mrs. Charlton?"

"Who, indeed! and he looks as if he was off there now!"

Mrs. Charlton and Marion were awaiting their visitor in the drawing room, for although he could have been there earlier, he would not enter the gate until his handsome gold repeater told him it was after seven.

A widow's costume does not admit of much variety; but Elsie Charlton looked very beautiful in the thick-ribbed black silk, richly trimmed with crape which she wore, and the bodice, being slightly open in the front, showed the snowy neck, scarcely less white than the liss which nestled softly around it, which the jet necklet made but whiter.

Mr. Hilhouse did not approve of dress; maintaining that it was our shame, having been necessitated by the sin of our first parents, and ought, consequently, not to be a subject of pride!

He therefore went very shabby himself, and made his family do the same.

The prettiest dress Marion had, she bade one of the Rectory servants to carry round to "The Nest" for her, and when she appeared in the drawing-room her friend examined her critically.

"It's horrid! is it not?" cried Marion, in disgust; "there's not a bit of style about it; but I've nothing better."

The dress was of oatmeal cloth, of an *ecru* shade, and was altogether too colourless to suit Marion.

"It's not horrid at all," returned Mrs. Charlton, in a business-like manner; "but, nevertheless, I could improve it. Come upstairs with me a moment, dear."

Marion followed her readily, and so did Trusty, into her bedroom; and both watched to see what she was about.

She rang and told her maid to bring her a handful of crimson roses from the garden; then opening a drawer in her wardrobe, she took out some exquisite lace ruffles and sleeves, and deftly exchanged them for the plain linen cuffs and collar which Marion wore, and when the roses came, she pinned a cluster of them in the girl's dark hair, and another lying from her left shoulder to the neck of her dress in front, and lifted her face and kissed her.

"Now you look quite fetching, Marion," she said, merrily. "So make your running with the chameleon curate as soon as you please, but don't think me a wet blanket for giving you a word of warning, dear girl. Try and retain your heart in your own keeping until he asks for it. You don't know men, Marion. Some of them are such deceivers, and all they care about is to make conquests, and think nothing of the unhappiness they cause."

"Oh! dear Mrs. Charlton, surely you can't think that of Mr. Gresham!" cried the girl, excitedly; "he is too much of a gentleman to deceive anyone, and I—I am certain he likes me already," and the roses on the girl's cheeks deepened to the hue of those upon her dress.

"You mean you are quite sure you like him, my innocent chick; but be warned, dear, and do not be in a hurry to give away your heart's affection. I speak feelingly, Marion. I once thought I was beloved, and had a painful awakening; it comes to so many, my dear girl," she said, earnestly.

"I am so sorry you have suffered, little woman, so very sorry," said Marion, with feeling. "But, my dear, it is too late to warn me. I love Mr. Gresham already; loved him when I saw him walking in the town, and buying the roan cob. I knew then that he was my

'fate,' Elsie, and I shall never change. Help me to gain him, for I can never care for anyone else—never—and I can never be happy without him. Let us meet at your house, you kind little darling, and if he only learns to love me, I shall indeed owe you a debt of gratitude."

And she flung her arms about the widow's neck and hugged her.

"And if it all ends badly?" she answered, smiling sadly at her, "what then, Marion? You will blame me for throwing you together, for I tell you truthfully, my child, I do not trust Mr. Gresham. He is altogether too polite and smooth. I do not believe he is sincere."

"I believe in him, Elsie, with all my heart," said the girl, fervently.

"I am sorry for it, very sorry. I wish he had never come here, Marion. I am so afraid for you; you have such a warm, true heart. I cannot bear to have it made to suffer."

Again the girl wove her arms round her friend.

"Give me my chance, Elsie, it is all I ask; and I will cast my life's happiness in the scale."

"You little gambler!" replied Mrs. Charlton, kissing her. "Well, have your own way. My home is yours, child, to do what you like with."

Then they went down, hand-in-hand, like two children, with Trusty, as usual, in attendance, to the drawing-room again.

"May I pick your flowers, Elsie?" asked Marion, brightly, as she stood at the French window looking out, and espied some beautiful white roses in the conservatory beyond.

"Yes, certainly. Do you want a button-hole for his reverence?"

"No!" she replied, shyly, "as if I should make a rush at him like that!" and she escaped from the room, and returned with a pure white rose and some buds, which she fastened to the breast of Mrs. Charlton's dress.

"Widows are not allowed such luxuries as flowers; but I'll wear it, dear, for your sake," she said gently. "And, now, here is Mr. Gresham coming in at the gate, and draped for conquest, I declare! Marion, our friend appears to-night in a fresh character. We shall have to issue play-bills if he goes on like this. Re-appearance of the Rev. Faulkner Gresham, &c., &c. 'You are especially requested to secure tickets early!'"

"Elsie! don't tease."

"No, dear, I won't! Marion, his knock is perfection, I never heard a better one; and there is a great deal of individuality in a knock. You would know that one, was administered by a polished hand."

She was lying back indifferently as she spoke, in an easy chair; while her friend, on the contrary, was standing by the mantel, with her well-shaped arm resting upon it, and her bright face flushed with excitement and anticipation. And, as the door opened, the man of the world had but little difficulty in comprehending their respective positions.

Mrs. Charlton rose and welcomed him with her usual graceful ease, and after a few moments of amusing chatter the butler entered and announced dinner.

"I cannot suggest your being a thorn between two roses, Mr. Gresham," said Mrs. Charlton; "nor would it be an easy position to be the connecting link between the houses of York and Lancaster, which we seem to represent. So I will ask you to take in my guest, and I will walk behind to see that you don't get into mischief."

"Your orders are my law," he said, readily; but there was a tinge of disappointment in his voice nevertheless.

"A gentleman looks better at the head of the table," she continued, seating herself at the side, "so well give you the seat of honour, and I shall be able to look at Marion."

"You couldn't have a prettier sight, I'm

sure," he said, softly, "and I am blessed with two beautiful visions, one on either hand!"

"Yes! if you can manage to keep an eye on each of us; but I confess I couldn't in your position, and I don't think the attempt would be becoming to you, Mr. Gresham. It would end in a sort of outward squint, I should fear," said Mrs. Charlton, drily.

"Well, it might," he acknowledged, with an assumed smile, but he felt a shade of rising anger against the saucy widow, who, he saw, was bent on taking him down a peg; but his annoyance wore off under the genial influence of as perfect a little dinner for three as he had ever enjoyed, without the trouble of carving, for the butler performed that onerous duty at a side table, and the footman handed the viands round quickly while still steaming hot.

What was supposed to be cold was really gold, and iced.

The flowers upon the table were tastefully arranged, the plate was very handsome. The blinds were drawn down, and the lamp cast a rosy hue upon everything.

Mr. Faulkner Gresham was just in his element. Ease, beauty, and luxury were to him the some of combination.

And not only was the dinner good, but the wines were of the best; a fact which he quickly recognised, and he did them justice.

"Ecce totales are great losers, Miss Marion," he said, chaffingly, "and I should really like you to taste this delicious Moselle. It has such an exquisite bouquet."

"I believe I should enjoy it," returned Marion, regretfully; "but my father would be very vexed with me if I were to take wine of any sort."

"Then I must not persuade you to be disobedient, I suppose?" he said, and raising his own glass to his lips he drained it with satisfaction.

"And now tell us how you have amused yourself all day, Mr. Gresham," said Mrs. Charlton, fixing her grey eyes upon him. "Not much work, I expect. Now, confess!"

"What makes you think that?" he asked.

"Well, my idea is that your first endeavour would be to study the natives and their manners and customs, before laying out your plan of campaign."

He laughed merrily.

"You seem to understand me, Mrs. Charlton," he said, softly. "I have done so. I lunched alone with 'Aunt Mary Ann.' I spent some time with Mr. Jenkins of 'The Three Swans,' and made arrangements with him about keeping my cob. I bought a saddle and bridle, and had afternoon tea with Dr. and Mrs. King. Don't you think that is an average day's work?"

"You lunched alone with Miss Hilhouse, and live to tell the tale!" cried Mrs. Charlton, with mock dismay. "You are a Christian martyr! I pity you!"

Marion's soft eyes were looking straight into his.

"I hope she did not make herself disagreeable," she said, anxiously. "I should be so very sorry if she did; but we can none of us help what 'Aunt Mary Ann' does, for father upholds her authority among us, so even poor mother has to put up with her. Dear mother! I wonder how she is to-night! Very, very tired, I am afraid. I hope Nellie will remember all her ways; but I generally used to put her to bed," ended Marion, thoughtfully.

"I trust the change will do your dear mother good, Miss Marion," said Mr. Gresham, kindly. "Then you will, indeed, feel glad that she went. As for your aunt, we are getting on together very well, I assure you."

Both the ladies looked at him in surprise.

"Do you really mean it?" asked Marion. "Wasn't she angry at seeing your High Church coat? And were you obliged to drink water at lunch? Do, please, tell us all about it!"

"Oh, yes. I drank water; it was not worth while to ask for anything else upon so short an

acquaintance. Well, her eyes *did* fix upon the out of my coat when I joined her; but she says she is satisfied with her brother's choice of a *locum tenens*."

"Did she?" laughed Mrs. Charlton, gaily. "Then, Mr. Gresham, you must be the 'prince of humbugs,' for you and Miss Hilhouse could no more assimilate than oil and water."

"We got on excellently, I assure you," he persisted. "I poured the oil upon the water, Mrs. Charlton, and calmed the lady down."

"Oh, please, describe your interview with my aunt," pleaded Marion. "I would have given anything to have witnessed it unseen."

"I am not sure it would have pleased you," returned the widow, quietly; "and if Mr. Gresham is going to honour us with a representation of Aunt Mary Ann, let us escape into the garden first, and enjoy it under the verandah, where smoking is permitted, although it is not in the house. Come, Marion. Mr. Gresham, when you are tired of your own society you can join us."

"If that is to be the test, I am weary of it already," he replied, politely, "and, with your permission, I'll accompany you."

Saying which, he sauntered after the ladies, and they were soon all three comfortably seated in lounging chairs, enjoying the cool evening air beneath the rose-hung verandah, with the bright stars peeping out one by one overhead.

CHAPTER XI.

AN EVENING WALK IN LOVE-LANE.

"Well, and what did you think of Miss Hilhouse's style of coiffure?" inquired Mrs. Charlton, quizzically. "Are not her window curtains something unique?"

"Certainly, as far as the lady's beauty is concerned, one feels inclined to 'pull down the blind,'" he laughed. "Nevertheless, I mean to make a friend of Aunt Mary Ann;" and he gave a covert glance at Marion, which said to her that it was for her sake that he was doing it, and she received it, as he meant her to do, with pleasure.

"We're all attention," said Mrs. Charlton, demurely.

"Well, I found Aunt Mary Ann knitting," he began, after a pause.

"She is always knitting," struck in Marion. "She can't see to do anything else. I verily believe she knits in her sleep, too. I cannot picture my aunt without the click of her needles and the rustle of her dress."

"Well, I suppose some one is the better for all the socks," suggested Mrs. Charlton.

"No one in Market Glenton. She sends them all to some Eastern mission for the natives, because she does not think it is decent that they should appear without them."

"And does she supply shoes also?" inquired Mr. Gresham.

"Oh, no! it is only the impropriety she thinks of, and wishes to avert," laughed the girl.

"Then I'm afraid the socks won't last long," said Mrs. Charlton, "and the natives would not wear them if they did, it is far too hot."

"Well!" continued Mr. Gresham, "Miss Hilhouse was doing something else, Miss Marion; she was reading, and seemed to be enjoying it thoroughly."

"I know," cried the girl, clapping her hands, together with amusement, "it was the commination service!"

"So it was, and she appeared to be deriving much information therefrom, and had arrived at the conclusion that the sentences were not to be understood in too narrow a sense, and that the individual who led the blind man out of the way was merely a foreshadowing of her morally blind niece, Marion, and her worldly friend, Mrs. Charlton, who was, she feared, leading her out of the straight path

which she herself travels, blue socks, and prayer book in hand. Does it not strike you as a signally beautiful picture? How I long for the brush of an artist that I might transfer it to canvas; it would look well on the walls of the Academy."

"I can't oblige you so far as that," said Mrs. Charlton, jumping from her seat; "but I think I can place it on paper," and she ran off into the drawing room, and from a dainty escritoire she drew out some paper and a pencil, and returning, with a book for a table, she rapidly sketched a life-like caricature of Miss Hilhouse, as she had herself seen her, sitting at her knitting with the open book before her; and, in the distance, herself and Marion caught by brambles in the thicket of worldly pleasures, with a precipice in front of them, which they did not seem to see. "There!" she said, presenting it gravely to Mr. Gresham, "suppose you show that to Miss Hilhouse at your next pleasant *tête-à-tête*, as an illustration of the state of my moral degradation," she added, with a laugh.

"This is excellent," said the Curate, examining it critically. "Mrs. Charlton, you draw really well, and have the rare talent of being able to express much in a few lines. I shall value your gift very greatly," and taking a Russian leather note-book from his breast pocket, he laid the sketch carefully in it, and returned it to its place.

"It was not intended as a gift," said Mrs. Charlton, vexedly. "Mr. Gresham, I call that taking an unfair advantage."

"All is fair," he began, and hesitated.

"It is well not to conclude an inapt quotation," she interrupted, coldly, and rising, she entered the drawing-room, and rang for coffee, and left the two alone; and going out at another door, she escaped into the garden by herself, and remained there for some time unseen, sitting upon a rustic seat, with Trusty at her feet. One hand was laid upon his soft smooth head, the other was pressed against her breast, from whence proceeded the rustle of paper, and after a few moments of hesitation she drew out a closely written letter, and read it from beginning to end.

Then she sat thinking, thinking of that night when a stranger had rescued her from the red and fiery flames, which were all around and about her; while he who should have cared for her safety, escaped like a coward from the billiard-room, where in the small hours of the morning he was still amusing himself.

And from that time the man who saved her had been her friend.

The letter she carried in her bosom was from him, and his name was Cecil Hilhouse. In that letter he told her he was coming home to see his mother, as the accounts he had received as to her health were, he considered, very unsatisfactory, and the news that he was coming had given Mrs. Charlton unalloyed pleasure.

And notwithstanding the fact that Mrs. Hilhouse's absence from home might entirely change her son's plans and bring disappointment to herself, Elsie Charlton had worked to get Mr. Hilhouse to carry out the urgent wishes of Dr. King.

"She is so dear to Cecil," she murmured, "and I could but think of her good, before my own happiness, could I, Trusty? And you will love my friend, won't you old boy? He will love you too, because you are so like his own doggie, who was never heard of after he left him; and I believe you would try to follow me, my Trusty, if ever I were to go away, poor old dog! How Cecil fretted after him, and what a pity it was the poor doggie didn't know he was not going to be deserted, but that his master was coming back, when he had paid his farewell visits, to take him to India; and now all he has left of his poor old Trusty is his picture, so I'll give him a share in you, shall I?" and she stooped and looked into his intelligent eyes.

He was gazing at her with his head on one side and his ears pricked, and his tail kept giving

heavy thumps against the corded silk dress, and against the gravel path, and he looked as though he longed for words to tell her something; and she wondered what his secret could be, whether he had ever had a happy life before he fell into the bad hands from which she had rescued him.

"Tell me, boy," she said, "had you ever a good, kind master, and would you like to see him again?"

He gave a great bound, and, planting both his paws upon her dress, he uttered a low, joyous bark, as though he understood her words.

"Poor old fellow! I'm afraid I can't find your master for you," she continued; and he looked at her with his head on one side.

"And if I were able, I couldn't spare my guard of honour," and she patted him affectionately.

That bark had revealed Mrs. Charlton's whereabouts, and Mr. Gresham suggested strolling to look for her, and to tell her that the coffee had been brought out; and Marion, although she would have preferred a prolonged *tête-à-tête*, accompanied him.

"You have been playing truant, Elsie," she said. "What made you come here alone?"

Mrs. Charlton hastily placed the letter in her pocket, but not before Marion had recognized her brother's writing, and those closely written sheets were a revelation to her, for Cecil was not given to penmanship in a general way.

"I'm not alone," replied Mrs. Charlton, quietly. "Trusty and I are the best of friends, and enjoy each other's society."

"It is selfish of him to monopolize you," returned Mr. Gresham, seating himself beside her. "I wonder if he will make friends with me," he continued, lightly.

"I don't know; he's very particular. He requires his allies to be true as tried steel, and as faithful as himself. He dislikes far more people than he likes; discerning dog!"

Mr. Gresham laughed.

"I'm afraid you have not a very elevated idea of human nature," he said, lowering his voice.

"You're right," she answered, gravely. "I've seen too much of it, and know that even the most pleasant people are often not to be trusted, and my dog has learnt the same lesson."

Trusty was lying with his great eyes fixed critically upon the parson's face, and when he stroked him he growled.

Mr. Gresham withdrew his hand at once.

"He's a savage fellow!" he said. "I hope he does not bite."

"Oh, dear no," returned Mrs. Charlton, indifferently; "he's far too gentlemanly and well trained to do that; but I always allow him to express his opinion, and so far I have never known him err in his instincts. He is very fond of Marion, but Miss Hilhouse's gaze at, as though he had seen a scarecrow, and to think that you can get on with that woman!"

"Well! is it not best to live peaceably with her?"

"Much, if you can; but I couldn't."

"Mr. Gresham is right, Elsie, dear," said Marion, "and it would have been dreadful for me if they had not got on together."

"As it is, we have banded to try and train Miss Marion in the way in which she should go," he laughed.

"Indeed! but which of you is to decide on the proper route, Mr. Gresham, for I don't think you and Aunt Mary Ann will agree upon that point, even though you may upon our moral delinquencies, oh, Marion? And, goodness gracious, child, did you make any rash promises as to the time you would return home, for it is half-past nine now, and I verily believe I heard you say you would be back at ten?"

"So I did," returned the girl, regretfully. "I am very sorry to be obliged to go, Elsie, I have had such a happy day!"

"And I am sorry to part with you; but you

must return as soon as possible. I must print you an 'at home' card to remind you that I shall always be at home to you; and no doubt Mr. Gresham will drop in sometimes and give us the news, when he can tear himself away from Aunt Mary Ann; but it strikes me he is getting up a flirtation with her—nothing else could have turned her gall into honey. Well, she would make an excellent parson's wife, and you might delegate the pulpit to her with good effect. And now, if you will take your coffee, Mr. Gresham, I'll go up with Marion to dress; or perhaps you would prefer a brandy and soda? I'm afraid Miss Hilhouse will not indulge you when you get home."

"Thank you. I think I should," he acknowledged, and the ladies left him sipping the refreshing beverage while they went upstairs.

"Well, do you still like him?" asked Mrs. Charlton, holding her friend's hands, and looking earnestly into her face.

"Like him! Oh, indeed, yes! He is most delightful!"

"Yes, he's good company; but I dare say he laughs at us to Miss Hilhouse, just as he laughs at her to us."

"Oh, Elsie, I am sure he doesn't! He likes and admires you so very much; and I think it is good of him to put up with my aunt's peculiarities for my sake."

The little widow looked at her with a shade of pity in her eyes, then she kissed her.

"Well, dear, if you are satisfied, I suppose I ought to be," she said, and led the way to the drawing-room.

"And now, Mr. Gresham, I must ask you to see Marion home," she said, seeing him still in company with his brandy-and-soda, looking lazily comfortable in the luxurious chair in which he was lounging. "It behoves us to take great care of her in the absence of her parents, and I am going to trust her to you."

He arose at once, but looked disappointed that he could not remain for a *little-à-little* with the young widow, which he had promised himself.

"I will take every care of Miss Marion," he assured her.

Then he and the girl went away under the star lit heavens.

"Do you like an arm in the dark, Marion?" he asked, omitting the prefix of "Miss" now that they were alone together, and he drew her hand into it's shelter as he spoke, making the susceptible young heart go pit-a-pat with joy and happiness.

"What a refreshing night! There is no need to go straight home, is there? Cannot you show me some pretty winding path, with trees instead of houses?"

"We might go round by Love-lane," she returned, softly; "the trees arch overhead, and it is ever so pretty by daylight; now it will be almost dark; it comes out just opposite 'The Three Swans,' don't you remember, Mr. Gresham?"

"Of course I do—the very thing. We shall not forget our first stroll alone together, and in so suitable a place, eh, little Marion? and if it is dark you can lean on me. I will take care of you, never fear."

"I don't," she answered, simply. "I can quite trust you."

"Marion, will you promise that?" he asked, earnestly. "Our acquaintance is short, but I feel already what a dear girl you are. And, Marion, I want you never to misjudge or mistrust me. You know my position here is a difficult one, and it would not do for your father to think I took advantage of his absence to gain your—friendship," he added, after a minute of hesitation; "so I must be careful not to pay you too much attention before those who would be likely to make mischief of it."

"You mean Aunt Mary Ann," she replied, readily; "of course not; and oh! Mr. Gresham, you may be sure I will never misjudge or mistrust you. You can't think how your friendship will add to the pleasure of my life."

I have had really no one to understand me, except mother, till you and Mrs. Charlton came among us; and I am so glad to have you both."

"But your brother and sister!"

"Oh! Cecil is splendid; but he is so many years my senior."

"Older than I am? I am thirty, Marion."

"No! he is younger than you; but when he was last at home he was a man, and I scarcely more than a child, and at that age it makes a real difference."

"So it does—and Nellie?"

"Nellie and I are very good friends, very; but we're not alike, and Nellie does not understand me at all."

"I think I do, Marion!" he whispered, softly, and pressed the hand which lay upon his arm.

"Oh! I hope you do," she answered, with a quiver in her voice. "I should be very unhappy if I thought you did not."

"Then be happy, sweet Marion," he replied, leaning towards her till his face nearly touched her own.

"I am," she said, "very, very happy;" and they emerged from the shadowy lane into the street.

"Wife!" whispered Jenkins to his better half, as he stood smoking his pipe on the doorstep. "It is Miss Marion; they're gone home arm-in-arm, and I am glad."

"Miss Hilhouse," said Mr. Gresham, as they entered the room, as the clock struck ten, "You see we are punctual!"

But he omitted to add that it was more by luck than good management.

"And I have brought your niece safely home, at Mrs. Charlton's request. I hope you spent a pleasant evening at Mr. Slowcombe's. Will you read prayers, or shall I?" as his eyes fell upon the books already laid out upon the table.

"Oh! yes, certainly," answered Aunt Mary Ann. "You must assume all my brother's duties."

"With your assistance," he added, in a low voice, and turning, gave such a comic look at Marion, that she found it difficult not to laugh.

So did the pretty parlour-maid, whose eyes he quite accidentally met as she entered the room!

CHAPTER XII.

"ELSIE, HAVE YOU A WELCOME FOR ME?"

THREE months after, a great many changes had taken place at Market Glenton.

Mr. Gresham had stirred up the old place, and no mistake!

Everybody had gone Mr. Gresham mad, and many were the female hearts laid at his feet.

No one could say the town was not lively now, and the "curate-in-charge" had kept his word. He had persuaded many of his parishioners to deal in the town, and the trade was better than it been for years.

Miss Hilhouse had been very cleverly managed, and was quite Mr. Gresham's right hand.

The socks and the communion service were laid aside, for the good lady was treasurer and secretary to all the clubs which the curate had reorganized, given life to, or set going.

Moreover, she was no longer Calvinistic in her views; but a decided Puseyite!

The bell of the old church was ringing from morning till night, and in the front pew always sat Miss Hilhouse, her cold grey eyes raised with decided interest to Mr. Gresham's complacent face. And a few seats back was Marion, with her soft, brown orbs also fixed on his, full of love-light, and she did not omit to attend the numerous services either.

Nor were these ladies the only victims. Miss Slocombe was among Mr. Gresham's ardent admirers, and several others worshipped at the same shrine; and all of them, Miss Slocombe, Marion, and Miss Hilhouse in-

cluded, were working hard for him, at altar cloths, offertory bags, cloths for the lectern, reading desk, and pulpit, and slippers innumerable.

Only if the truth must be confessed, the last-mentioned lady had sent a portion of it to a London house to be done, while she pretended to be busy upon the manufacture of it in the privacy of her own chamber.

Miss Hilhouse was a very altered woman. Bows of bright ribbon now enlivened her black silk dresses, and ornaments relieved them.

She had learnt the lesson of the "cheerful countenance" from Mr. Gresham, at any rate in his presence.

If her acrobatic was still felt in his absence, the fact did not disconcert him at all; although he probably heard of it through that good-natured third element, which always seems to be in the way, at those weak moments when one's faults become more conspicuous than usual.

As to Miss Hilhouse herself, she had perhaps never been so happy since her youth. She had always considered herself cut out for the wife of a clergyman, and it was the life she had coveted above all others.

To be the acknowledged female head of a parish, was just what she would like and appreciate; and now, for the first time in her many summers and winters, she believed this happiness was really coming to her.

So far as Aunt Mary Ann knew how to be in love, she was in love with Mr. Gresham.

Her love furnished her up, and made her desire to look well in his eyes.

She was ready to go his road, if by doing so she might accomplish her own ends; but there was no softness or gentleness engendered in her mind by the feeling. She fully believed in the seriousness of Mr. Gresham's attentions to her, and perhaps it was not to be wondered at; for they were the first she had ever received, and she was unaware how little such things mean from a man of the world.

Mr. Gresham had, you may be sure, said nothing of a compromising nature to the matured spinster, but he had whispered so many kindly words—sweet nothings in themselves, which yet his eyes and voice and touch had lent a meaning to—that Miss Hilhouse believed he was only waiting for her brother's return, to ask his consent to making her his wife.

When alone with her, he so constantly spoke of the wisdom of a clergyman marrying a woman sufficiently old to help him with her experience, and said what a benefit such a wife would be to a parish, that Miss Hilhouse considered herself absolutely engaged to Faulkner Gresham.

She gave in, one by one, to all his wishes and ways—but about that thing which troubled her most, she was silent.

Teetotalism was a thing of the past at the Rectory at Market Glenton.

She heard without a sigh that the old square pews were to be demolished in the church; that the commandments were to be taken down from behind the altar, and the wall inlaid with many coloured tiles.

She knew that her *protégé* was getting up private theatricals in the school-rooms, and that the money derived from them was to be given to the Church's restoration fund, and she had even offered to take a short part herself, if Mr. Gresham really desired it.

But Fridays were not pleasant days to poor Aunt Mary Ann. She religiously fed Mr. Gresham with eggs and fish, both on Wednesdays and Fridays, and never forgot the delicacies in the way of sweets afterwards (in which she was well aware his soul delighted), because those days were fast days!

All this and more, Calvinistic Miss Hilhouse had come to do for Mr. Gresham; but it went to her heart on Friday mornings to see the string of penitents admitted one by one to his study, and to know that they were by turns shut up with him there for indefinite periods, during which she could not tell what they were saying or doing.

Heavens, how she longed to ascertain! She had tried the key-hole and the cracks, and had even lain down on the floor to endeavour to see under the door.

But both sight and sound were shut off. A second one, covered with crimson cloth, which before the confessional began, he had persuaded her to have put inside the original one, to keep the draughts off, of which he complained, though they never had inconvenienced her brother during his many years of occupation.

Those Friday mornings were her thorns in the flesh, and made her restless and uncomfortable; but, Friday past, she had six days of peace.

Nor was Aunt Mary Ann the only one who looked to the return of Mr. Hilhouse as the end of the period of her probation.

Gentle, loving Marion, who every day found her life's happiness more involved with Mr. Gresham's, waited with her heart shining from her soft, lustrous eyes, with perfect trust and confidence in him, for that time too, when he would, she was sure, ask for her hand, to keep for ever, with the heart which he had made all his own. And all the other ladies were equally certain of his truth also; each one satisfied that she was waiting for some cloud to pass away, some obstacle to be removed.

The old church was now every Sunday crowded to suffocation, for it was a very long time since such a preacher had been heard within its walls.

Mr. Gresham never kept them more than a quarter of an hour, and his sermon was seldom over ten minutes long. Yet in that time he had said as much as an average mind could carry away, and in such a manner that it was impossible not to carry it.

Mr. Gresham was a very clever actor, and he knew exactly how to speak with effect, how to bring tears to those hundreds of eyes which were fixed upon him so intently; how to make his hearers dwell upon and wait for his words with breathless interest. His very action was studied beforehand; and, although he preached extemporary sermons, he had well thought over the subject he was preaching upon, and knew exactly what he was going to say, and how he intended to say it, before he began; and his looking-glasses could have spoken of many rehearsals which had taken place before them, had they only been blessed with tongues.

Moreover, he had prepared for the congregation another attraction.

The drawing, old-world hymns were no longer used, and the Ancient and Modern selection were substituted, and placed in every pew, and the chancel seats, which had formerly been occupied by the rector's family on one side, and his servants on the other, were now filled by a surpliced choir, and the old organist had been discharged altogether, while Marion and Mrs. Charlton had undertaken to teach the choir and play the organ for the Sunday services.

It had required a great deal of persuasion to draw the little widow into the work, and Mr. Faulkner Gresham, somewhat to his surprise, signally failed in getting her to carry out his wishes; but she could not resist Marion's pleadings, and at length consented to assist her in the music of the church, to sing in the anthem, and give an organ recital every Sunday evening.

This was an actual treat to lovers of music, and although some were obliged to leave the church when the service was over, not one did so who was able to remain.

Mr. Ebenezer Blight's chapel was emptied. In vain he ranted at the bare walls and at the scattered congregation in their own homes. In vain he called Mr. Gresham "Antichrist," everyone believed in Mr. Gresham, and ran after him, and the empty seats at the chapel were not filled.

At last Mr. Blight made up his mind to go to the church himself.

He went, and little as he liked all he saw and heard there, he was impressed by the sermon, and carried away by the power of Mrs. Charlton's music.

He said it was a most "wonderful performance," but that there was no religion in it; and more than ever he warned the people against the road they were travelling—a road which he acknowledged was but too attractive.

He did his very utmost to put a stop to the alterations in the services.

He called on Miss Hilhouse and pleaded with her. She crushed him.

He went to see Mrs. Charlton, to expostulate, and she quizzed him in her own merry way.

He appealed to Marion, but she was indignant, for Faulkner Gresham's sake.

He pleaded with Mr. Gresham himself. He argued with him. He twisted half the texts in the Bible into condemnatory phrases. He mourned over him. He quarrelled with him, but it was all of no use.

He could not get a single "rise" out of the curate in charge, and finally left him in a tornado of passion.

And into the midst of all these changes, just as the ladies were busily engaged decorating the church on Christmas Eve, and Mrs. Charlton was playing over the music for the morrow, Cecil Hilhouse entered by the vestry door, and stood looking on with astonishment.

And on seeing him Marion uttered a little cry of surprise, for India had not so changed her brother but that she knew him at once, and the recital came to a sudden break as Elsie Charlton heard that one voice in the world to which her heart responded.

But she quickly recovered her presence of mind, and much as she longed to fly to him, she determined to sit still and let the new comer seek her, and if the composer would not have recognized his own music the melody which her trembling fingers brought forth was full of sweetness, for she played far too well, and had too perfect an ear to do anything inharmonious.

Their greeting over, Marion whispered to her brother that he would find an old friend at the organ, and he did not need any broader hint.

He had heard Mrs. Charlton play before, and he did not doubt for one moment who he should find behind the curtain which shielded the player from view.

Marion, with her own heart full of love, slipped away, guessing the secret in that of her friend, and left them to meet alone.

"Elsie," said a manly voice behind her, "have you a welcome for me?" and in another moment he had nothing to complain of in the way of his welcome, for Mrs. Charlton had given him both her hands, and was looking affectionately into his face with a world of tender feeling in her own.

"Oh, Cecil! how glad I am that you have come," she murmured. "It is such a long time since we said good-bye."

"It is, indeed, and I have found it weary enough; but now I hope to be made much of. Shall I be, Elsie?"

She gave him no direct answer in words, but raised her eyes to his with a question.

"Do you know that your mother is in Mentone, Cecil?"

"Yes, I received all the home letters before I started. I shall, of course, go there to see my mother, but I felt I must come to Market Glenton, if only for a few days, first."

A gleam of happiness shot from her true grey eyes, and told her pleasure; but that was her only reply, and he continued,—

"Do you think her very ill, Elsie?" he inquired, anxiously.

"I really do," she returned, with truth. "She is utterly fragile. A puff of wind would blow her away. You must go to her soon."

"I understand you, and I will go; but I must stay a day or two here first. I am home just in time for Christmas. May I spend it with you, Elsie?"

"I did not know you would be here," she returned, softly; "and I have promised Marion to dine at the Rectory; but never mind, we shall be together, Cecil."

(To be continued.)

TRUE AS THE STARS.

—30—

CHAPTER XXXI.—(continued.)

Mrs. SUMNER hurried up to the sofa, and looked reproachfully at Lady Diana.

"What have you been saying to her?"

"I only said that Captain Dormer—"

"Don't, don't!" cried the invalid, raising herself on her elbow. "He's not to come! Oh! if you love me don't let him see me. I must go away—don't you hear Douglas is calling me?"

Lady Diana bent her head, and said impressively, in a tone of suppressed exasperation,—

"Douglas is not thinking of you. You needn't be afraid, he's far away; he won't interfere with you and Captain Dormer."

But the tawny eyes looked up at her with no comprehension of her words, and the small brown head sank back once more on the pillow, and though her lips moved no sound came from them.

"You must never mention his name, it excites her so terribly," said Mrs. Sumner, in a whisper. "I think she hates him, as the indirect cause of her illness."

"Hate him?" and Lady Diana's eyes flashed scornfully. "She loves him better than all the rest of the world put together, and he is the only man who can cure her."

"Do you think so?" doubtfully. "Is Captain Dormer's name 'Douglas'?"

"No," and Lady Diana flushed scarlet; "Douglas is the name of a man with whom she has nothing to do. It is some absurd fancy which has got into her head since her illness. My mother came home last night, and she will be so glad to see you if you can be spared," she added, hastily, turning the subject.

"If the poor child has a nice sleep I can manage to get away!" said Mrs. Sumner, readily.

Nursing was certainly not her vocation, and any change from the sick-room was welcome.

Lady Diana swept out of the room, all her jealous feelings rampant within her passionate breast. She went straight to Captain Dormer's rooms, and, having knocked, found him standing by the window looking out at the wide expanse of undulating park.

"Lady Diana, congratulate me!" he said, as he walked slowly across the room to meet her. "My colonel has managed it for me. I am to have some appointment out there, and I'm to start at once."

"But you are not fit for it; you will die on the road!" she said, looking up into his haggard face.

"Not if I go by slow stages," with a slight smile. "I can't stay here; I must be off. The doctor says the warm climate may do me good."

"As if Dr. Winter knew anything about it. You can't go," she said, with a frown. "After all that has passed it would be wicked to throw over Rhoda Macdonald."

His handsome face flushed, his heart beat fast.

"She is not mine to throw over," he said, in a low voice. "It is maddening to stay here and not know whether I am to have her or not."

"What is to prevent it? As to her liking you there is no doubt at all," a ring of scorn in her voice.

He passed his hand over his forehead, but said nothing.

"You will see her before you go?" she said, as a last hope.

"No; it will be better not."

"But you must, it won't be fair to her unless you do. What are you thinking of?" she cried, impatiently.

"Whatever is best for her I will do."

"Would it be best for her to think herself deserted?"

"She wouldn't think that; she would know I wanted to see her."

"I don't see how she could if you didn't manage it. When do you start?"

"On Wednesday, and I'm sure you will be thankful to get rid of me."

"I don't know why we should; but on Tuesday I shall insist upon Mrs. Sumner's going out for a drive, and then you shall see Rhoda, no matter how many people try to prevent you."

He bowed his thanks, and she left the room perfectly unconscious of the tempest she had raised in his heart, as the strong man struggled with a fierce temptation.

CHAPTER XXXII.

IS IT A GHOST?

RHODA was lying on the sofa in the dressing-room clothed in a soft white wrapper, trimmed with falling laces.

Her head was resting on a crimson cushion, and her lovely hair, which kind Dr. Winter had not let the heart to cut off, fell in profusion over her shoulder and over the back of the sofa.

The shawl which had been thrown over her lay in a heap of brilliant colour on the floor, and her small feet, clad in Turkish slippers, peeped out from below the lace edge of her skirt.

She looked more like a picture than a reality as she lay there calm and still, with a slight flush on her cheeks, just where the long lashes cast their shadow, her beautiful lips slightly parted, her white hands as motionless as if they had just been sculptured by a skillful chisel.

Oh, who could tell the force of the pent-up longing in Frank Dormer's heart, as he looked down on the white beauty of the girl whom he had held in his arms on that night of horror!

It was the second time that Lady Diana had played the part of the temptress, and now, as she saw Dormer's face working with emotion, watched his laboured breathing, marked the convulsive closing of his hands, she moved away towards the window, and turned her back to the lovers, her face to the lovely view outside.

She could not guess that Frank was telling himself over and over again—"I have no right to speak to her; she belongs to Yel!"

He knew he must get away, or even his iron resolution might bend and break.

Love drew him on, but honour stood between them, and waved him back.

Slowly he stooped and raised one soft brown curl to his lips, as he had done once before, intending to escape without a word.

But as his dark moustaches lingered lovingly on the curl, there was a noise at the other end of the room which startled Rhoda from her sleep.

There was no mistaking the radiant look of intense, rapturous love which flashed from her eyes, and which brought him to his knees as her glance met his, but the next moment she covered her face with her hands, and shrank back as if terrified.

"Go," she panted, "and let me never see you again. Go this moment, or I'll kill myself! Go! I told you not to come!"

"I am going. I only came to say good-bye!" looking white and grieved. "Say one word before I go!"

"No, no, no!" burying her face in the cushions and trembling with excitement. "I will not look at you, I will not listen to you! Oh, help, help, help! Take him away—take him away!"

Captain Dormer moved away sorrowfully.

"I have done her more harm than good," he said, regretfully.

Lady Diana moved quickly across the room, and laid her hand on the girl's shoulder.

"Rhoda," she said, with a sort of passion

in her voice, "don't let Captain Dormer go like this; it is cruel. Tell him honestly that you love him."

Rhoda turned her face, and looked up at Lady Diana with wild eyes.

"I'd rather die!" she said, breathlessly. "I never, never mean to see him again. For Heaven's sake take him away!" and again she shook like a leaf in the wind, and her teeth absolutely chattered.

Frank cast a look of unutterable tenderness at her, and retired towards the door. He was met by the nurse, who looked at him angrily, and said,—

"Dear me! No wonder the poor young lady's bad, if visitors come in without my leave!"

"I am Captain Dormer, and I only came to say good-bye!" he said, quietly.

"If I had known who you were, sir, I wouldn't have let you come within five hundred yards of her!" and she hurried forward to the sofa with a distressed expression on her face, knowing that incalculable mischief might have been done in her absence.

The next morning Dormer left, taking a burden of doubt and anxiety with him, for he had heard from the nurse that Miss MacDonald had passed a very bad night, and been wildly excited.

Evidently his own presence only did her harm, so that it was as well that he should go away.

If he could manage to catch sight of Yelverton in Egypt he swore that he would get the truth out of him, even if he had him only for five minutes amidst a rain of bullets.

With this fever of anxiety upon him he did not take the journey as leisurely as he should, and was very nearly laid up at Suakin; but he pushed on to the front, feeling desperately ill, and not at all in a state to bear the necessary hardships of the march.

He heard of Yelverton constantly, for the Blue Lancers had already had a chance of distinguishing themselves, and he had fought gallantly like the rest.

Whilst Frank was working his way through the desert on the back of a camel, parched with thirst and often faint for want of proper food, there was some excitement at Castle Stuart.

Lady Diana had been feeling restless and uneasy all day, and was just going upstairs to dress for dinner when a footman came up to her with an orange-coloured envelope on a silver tray.

As she took it up—she did not know why—but a sickening dread came over her, and she hesitated with it in her hand.

She tore it open, and saw it was from her cousin, whose regiment had been quartered for the last six weeks in the same place as the Blue Lancers, and with eyes that could scarcely decipher the written words she saw these words,—

"Splendid action; beaten the Arabs into fits. Yelverton wounded; sent to the rear."

A mist came before her eyes, and the paper fell to the ground. He was wounded—badly, of course, or else he would not be sent to the rear—very badly, or her cousin would not have taken the trouble to telegraph!

She must go to him at once. She sought out her father dozing in his study, and electrified him with the news that he must be prepared to start for Egypt next morning without fail.

The Earl swore a good round oath that he would see himself somewhere else first, and then he wouldn't; but when she put her arms round his neck and laid her soft cheek against his rough one, and reminded him of his promise, and told him positively that nothing on earth should keep her in England, but that she and her maid would start alone, whether there was a scandal or not, then he began to remember that the doctors had recommended a change for the good of his health, and that he had desired to have a look round to satisfy himself as to the management of our troops and their commissariat, also that he had been harsh to the child about this

same good-for-nothing fellow, and that if a bullet were going to rid him for ever of an obnoxious son-in-law he might as well be civil to him on his departure.

All these reasons combined to soften his heart, and an apparently reluctant consent was extracted from him, to the surprise and indignation of the Countess.

All that night the servants were busy preparing for the journey, and the travellers started in the morning as soon as the Earl could be induced to leave the house.

The privacy of the sick room was not intruded on, for Lady Diana had private reasons of her own for not coming to wish the patient good-bye. She even cautioned Mrs. Sumner not to mention before Rhoda the reason for her sudden departure, which gave that estimable lady much food for reflection.

She had learnt by this time that the name that was so often on Rhoda's lips was the Christian name of the fascinating Captain Yelverton, who had charmed half the girls of Porthampton; and putting two and two together she began to suspect that her niece knew more of him than she had ever imagined. Again she was much exercised by Edward Staveley's behaviour, which had astonished her own husband.

Mr. Sumner had told her of his coming to inquire, and of his extraordinary exclamation when he heard of her serious illness.

She could not conceive how he could imagine himself to be responsible for it, whence she knew that he had not joined in the expedition to Lone Tower.

Rhoda was very bad all day, and Mrs. Sumner felt worried beyond description. She was longing to be back in her own home seeing after her own family, and superintending her servants; but she could not possibly go away till she could take her niece with her, and of that there seemed little chance at present. She did not get on very well with Lady Lockleven, who was a perfect contradiction to the description given of her to Rhoda on her first arrival by Percy Wyndham. She was a very fashionable lady, who took a great interest in the School of Art, South Kensington, and disapproved about it for hours together.

Unfortunately, Mrs. Sumner would not have cared a straw if the whole structure and all the various specimens of beautiful art-work had been destroyed by fire, providing no lives were lost, whilst it is probable that the Countess would have grieved much more over the loss of the art-work than over that of the art-workers.

Therefore Mrs. Sumner was terribly bored, although Percy Wyndham charitably tried to turn the conversation in a different direction. After what seemed an interminable evening, she retired to rest at an unusually early hour, leaving the nurse in charge of her niece; and the rest of the household were glad to go to bed, having been disturbed much earlier in the morning than usual.

Percy, who had been away for a few days' partridge-shooting, and had come back to the Castle the night before, summoned by a telegram from Lady Diana, spent most of the evening in Lord Brotherton's rooms, and afterwards strolled into the gardens with a cigar. He was just reproaching himself for his absurd infatuation for a girl who did not care a bit for him, when he saw something white creeping slowly down the path towards him.

In the perfect stillness, with deep, dark shadows all around him, there was something so ghostly in the whiteness of the figure that his nerves felt an uncomfortable thrill, but only for a moment, for Percy was as brave as a lion.

He threw away his cigar, stepped quietly back into the shadow and waited. Through a division in the trees that bordered the pathway, a moonbeam, bright and gold, shot across the gravel, and he saw that he would have the opportunity of finding out who it was that was coming so slowly towards him when she crossed the streak of light.

Motionless as a statue he waited, and then sprang forward, suppressing the cry which rose to his lips.

"Rhoda," he said, softly, "what are you doing here? You ought to be in bed," and then he threw his arm round her, and drew her gently to him, for she was nearly slipping from his grasp down upon the dewy ground.

Her face was white, her lips trembling, her eyes wide open with fear and feverish anxiety. "Let me go," she said, in a whisper, as if she had not strength to raise her voice, and yet clinging to him pitifully, as if she were afraid of falling. "I must get away from him; you won't prevent me? You've always been kind. I'm going to Portsmouth."

"Not to-night, dear!" he said, very gently. "When you want to go I'll take you, be sure of that. And you needn't run away from Dormer, because he's gone; he is, upon my honour."

"Gone? Are you sure?" passing her thin little hand across her forehead, and looking at him with earnest eyes.

"As sure as that I stand here. Now come back to the house," drawing her hand through his arm.

"One moment. He won't come back? You are certain?"

"Quite certain. He is miles and miles away. Come, you will catch cold. Can you get along, do you think? I wish I were a bigger man that I might carry you."

She did not answer, but let him lead her back, walking slowly, as if the exertion were painful to her, and absolutely panting with the effort.

He had almost to carry her when they reached the broad steps that led to the terrace, for her strength failed her.

As they waited a few minutes to rest before going any further, she said, in a low voice,—

"Is it very, very wicked for a married woman to fall in love?"

Percy could scarcely believe his ears. Considerably startled, he said, slowly,—

"That depends. She may fall in love because she can't help it, but she must pretend she hasn't, even to herself."

"Ah!" with a long-drawn sigh, and then in a lighter tone, "Douglas is waiting for me at Portsmouth," and he knew that her mind was wandering.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FOUND OUT.

FORTUNATELY the nurse, Mrs. Madison, having just missed her patient, came flying down stairs and on to the terrace in a terrible state of anxiety.

If it had not been for her help Percy Wyndham would have been sorely puzzled how to get Rhoda back to her room, for her strength had failed completely.

They managed it between them, though it took a long time, and the Countess came out in an elaborate dressing-gown to ask if the house was on fire. She was agitated at the sight of Rhoda looking like death between her two supporters, and insisted on accompanying them into her room, and making a great fuss.

Percy, having placed her on the sofa, could do no more, and retired to his own room with a heavy heart. It was all a puzzle that he could not possibly unravel, and there was only one thing which he knew for certain, and that was that Rhoda MacDonald, whether she were in love with Dormer or no, would never care one straw for the Hon. Percy Wyndham.

He took out a certain brown curl, and looked at it sentimentally, then remembered that there were a lot of nice girls in the world, and went to bed comforted.

There was a weary time of waiting before the doctor would allow Miss MacDonald to be moved. Her escapade in the garden had delayed her recovery, but now that she was left in peace, with no visits from Lady Diana to disquiet her, no fear of another from Frank Dormer, and no exciting topics broached in her

hearing, her mind began slowly to mend, as well as her strength.

One bright autumnal day Lady Lochleven's smart landau came to the door, and Rhoda was handed into it with the utmost care.

Percy, who had come down on purpose to see her off, kindly offered to accompany them on their way to Portsmouth. Mrs. Sumner was only too glad of his assistance, and wished devoutly that this good-looking, gentlemanly, and most good-natured young man were going to be Rhoda's husband.

Mr. Sumner and Edward Staveley met them at the end of their journey, the latter with flushed cheeks and an evident embarrassment in his manner.

Rhoda shook hands with him quietly, then turned to her uncle, who kissed her pale face with affection, and hoped "his little girl" was much better, and ready to dance at Virginia's wedding. She shook her head, and stepped into the old-fashioned yellow-bodied carriage without a word.

Percy came up to her side, saying,—

"Now I must give you up for good and all!"

Though his tone was light, there was a suspicious quiver about his mouth, and he held her hands in a close grasp.

"I can never thank you enough," she said, looking straight into his face with her wistful eyes; "but I shall never forget you."

"A girl's never!" How long is it?" and he smiled as he raised his hat, and turned away, knowing that, as he did so, he was also turning over one of the brightest pages of his life.

Sumner Lodge was in a state of excitement, for the wedding was close at hand, and Virginia was as busy as she could be.

Rhoda kept out of the bustle in the little old schoolroom. Amy often came in, healthy and cheerful as ever, to tell her a bit of news about the new bonnet from Paris, or the tiresome dress that wouldn't fit. She was very much annoyed at Rhoda's not being able to be a bridesmaid, and at her persistent refusal to appear at the wedding festivities. She had gone off in a huff one day, when the door was opened softly, and Edward Staveley came in.

He closed it noiselessly behind him, then came quickly across the room to Rhoda's sofa.

She looked up at him in utter astonishment, and saw that he was deadly pale.

"I thank you for not coming to our wedding," he said, hoarsely. "There are some things a fellow can't stand. I wanted to tell you that I've behaved awfully bad to you. Yes, I have—don't look at me like that! Do you remember dropping an envelope one day in the Portsmouth Road? I picked it up, and sent it to Lady Diana. I expect she was wild when she got it, and that was why she looked you up in that dungeon. I nearly cut my throat when I heard you were so bad."

"But she didn't know," Rhoda began, wonderingly.

"No, she didn't know half as much as I did, or she would have taken precious care to stay in England, and not make a fool of herself by rushing off to Egypt."

"To Egypt? You mean to say that she has gone to him?" slowly, as if she could scarcely credit her own ears, whilst her pulses began to throb, and her limbs to shake.

"Pon my word she has! He was wounded, you know, and she went off like a shot."

"This must be stopped. It is my place—my place!" wringing her hands. "I ought to be there to nurse him!"

"Oh, come! that is going too far. But listen, Rhoda. I've been a sneak, but all because I was so desperately fond of you. I went to the Bridgeton post-office and got these letters for you. I give you my honour I haven't read a word of them. I only kept them back."

She tore them from his hand, and studied the handwriting. It was her husband's! He had not forgotten her—he had not been faithless—he had not thrown her over for Lady Diana!

"You don't know what you've done," she said, and her lip trembled. "Now go—I feel nearly wild," putting her hands to her forehead.

"Say you forgive me," he said, eagerly.

"I may—some day. I only hope to Heaven you will treat my poor cousin better than you have me."

"It would have been all right if you had married me. Good-bye, my darling!" in a choked voice. Then he hurried to the door, biting his lip, and stumbled against Lord Faulkner.

The Viscount frowned, and said expressively,—

"You here, Mr. Staveley!"

Edward answered nothing, but escaped downstairs, and immediately afterwards the sound of his horse's hoofs broke the stillness.

Lord Faulkner came towards Rhoda with a very grave face, but she was not aware of it, as her own was hidden in her hands.

"I have been to Sea View," he said, quietly. "I've seen the register—I know everything."

She started violently, and looked up at him with startled eyes.

"You foolish child, why didn't you tell me the truth, instead of humbugging us all round? I'd have given a thousand pounds to know that Yelverton was married."

"He made me promise not to tell, and I thought he had forgotten me, because some one stole my letters," glancing at those in her lap.

"Oh, Faulkner, help me!" starting up and laying her hand on his arm. "He is wounded, and another woman has gone to nurse him! Is that right?"

"Another? Not Lady Di?" his face lengthening.

"Yes, she has gone, and I am here, as if I did not care a straw. Can't I go?"

"No; but, by Jove! I will. I will be after her like a shot! She will be half mad when she hears the news. She'll be ready to marry a chimney-sweep if he were handy, and she'll be only too glad to find somebody ready to take her and get her out of the scrape!" he said, excitedly.

Rhoda looked round the room with bewildered eyes.

"Won't my uncle take me? I ought to be there. I must go to him."

"Don't humbug me any more, child," said Lord Faulkner, almost roughly. "Heaven knows why Yelverton made you marry him; you can't have cared for him. Look at those letters, which you haven't even taken the trouble to open!"

Rhoda picked them up hastily.

"I have only just got them. I've had no time!"

"Supposing Dormer had been the writer, would you have waited an instant before you broke them open?" mockingly.

Her cheeks grew crimson, her head drooped.

"You've no right to insult me!"

"You are in a bad way when the truth becomes an insult. You needn't have any secrets from me," biting his moustaches, and looking savagely round as he thought of Lady Diana in Egypt, and feeling as if he must vent his anger on somebody, or something, or burst with rage. "You've been in love with him all along, and a fool could see it with half an eye."

"I tell you I will never see him again," she cried, passionately, striving to almost madness by his words. "Oh! Heaven help me! What can I do? I will start for Egypt to-night!"

"Yes, Dormer is there. No doubt you will find him by your husband's bedside. We might go together, and then I could tell him how I found you," his large eyes gleaming wickedly. "Perhaps you never knew, or did Wyndham tell you? Your arms round Dormer's neck, your head resting so touchingly on his shoulder. It was quite an affecting sight?"

"Why didn't I die?" with a sound like a wail, as she clenched her hands tight together. Perhaps he did not know what exquisite torture he was making her suffer, as her own

conduct appeared to her in the worst light, shorn of every excuse. She only remembered that she had been faithless, in heart at least, and forgot how a stronger will than her own had overruled her, and cast her into the very teeth of temptation, at a time when she felt forgotten and deserted.

"Well, it's a nasty business," he said after a pause. "I shall go to Yelverton, and make him do you justice, even if it's with his last breath, and I shall make him look out for another nurse," with a scowl.

"Which way do you go?" eagerly.
 "I shall start from Southampton and go across France; that's the shortest way. Don't say a word to your uncle and aunt, and I'll promise to get you out of the mess as soon as I come back. I don't mean to be rough on you; but to think of Lady Diana being out there drives me wild. Good-bye, little one," he said, patting her head familiarly.

She tossed it away from him indignantly, and would not look up at him as he went to the door.

Utterly selfish by nature, he was so engrossed by his own concerns that he forgot what a fatal effect his words might have on an enfeebled brain, and went downstairs to tell Mrs. Sumner that important business called him off at once, and he was sorry to say that he would not be able to be present at Virginia's wedding.

The bride and the bride's mother were aghast, but neither entreaties nor expostulations could move him, and he went off with a sullen cloud on his face.

The wedding-day was bright and beautiful, with a glorious sunshine enriching every autumnal tint on tree or shrub, and a golden haze hanging over the sea.

Looking very white, with dark circles round her eyes, Rhoda superintended the bride's toilette, and arranged her long tulle veil in graceful folds pinning it on with a small diamond butterfly on one side, which was her own present to her cousin. Then she kissed her affectionately, and with tears in her eyes hoped that she would be as happy as possible, a hope which was very fragile, considering that Mr. Staveley was to be the bridegroom.

"You poor little thing, how ill you look!" said Virginia, smiling kindly. "You shouldn't have put on that dull grey dress; it makes you look worse than ever!"

"Virginia! Virginia! are you never coming?" cried Harry, the schoolboy brother, who had come home for this grand affair.

She hurried out of the room in all her bridal finery, passed through a pathway of admiring servants, stepped into the carriage, and drove off to the church, whilst all the servants who could be spared jumped into a waggonette, which had been hired for the occasion, and followed as quickly as they could.

The house was nearly empty, and a great quiet settled down on it, after the bustle and confusion of the previous hours.

Nobody noticed a common cab which came and stood at the gate, or saw the cabman mounting the stairs to fetch a trunk from Miss Macdonald's room.

Any amount of thefts and petty larcenies might have taken place, especially after a small figure, dressed in sober grey, had stepped into the cab, and driven off in the direction of Portsmouth Dock.

Inside St. Mary's Church the bride and bridegroom were standing before the altar, surrounded and supported by a bevy of bridesmaids in bright blue, and a crowd of friends.

Amy was trying not to cry, and Edward Staveley was endeavouring to keep his thoughts from a pale, sweet face with tawny eyes, little thinking that the owner of it was standing alone amidst the bustle of a crowded dock, about to start on a long journey, with not a soul to take care of her, and only a slip of a note left behind to tell where she had gone and why she was going!

"Miss Macdonald!" exclaimed a well-known voice; "can I believe my eyes?"

"Oh, I'm so thankful to see you!" the colour rushing into her face. "I'm off to Egypt, and I don't know the route, and I'm sure you will help me."

Percy Wyndham's face grew very grave. "You are going all alone? Impossible!"

"I must!" very earnestly. "Douglas Yelverton is wounded, and I must go to him."

"It seems to me," very coldly, "that my cousin is more than sufficient. For the sake of your own—own proper dignity I must beg you to stay at home."

"I can't; he is my husband," with drooping lashes, and almost in a whisper.

"Good heavens!" looking inexpressibly shocked.

"We were married at Sea View secretly, and he went off at once to Egypt, and I never saw him again. Now that he is ill it is my duty to go to him. You must see that," looking up with pleading eyes.

This was why she had such a horror of love-making; this was why she tried so hard to avoid Frank Dormer; this was why she shrank from him still, even after that last good-bye in the dungeon!

The whole torture of the girl's position flashed before his mind, and his heart bled for her.

Now she would try to do her duty by her husband; and the scoundrel was still engaged to his own cousin!

He would go to Egypt himself, and confront the fellow even on his deathbed. He owed it to Diana to extricate her from her awkward dilemma; he owed it to himself to do the best for Rhoda Macdonald.

"I do see it," he said, gravely, "and, what's more, I'll come with you to help you carry it out."

(To be continued.)

ROYAL'S PROMISE.

—30—

CHAPTER X. (continued.)

"I could not help it," said Phyllis, when she had heard Nell's story, and good, kindly girl as she was, had cried over the narrative of her friend's troubles. "Mamma and the girls are furious. They say I am a disgrace to the family; but Nell, you trust me, don't you? And so you'll believe I could not help it."

Nell kissed her. "I haven't an idea what you've done, Phyllis. The dear old General forgot your name; he could only remember you were Rose's cousin."

"Rose is a darling! Oh, Nell! When I went to her wedding, just before it was settled for me to go to St. Hilda's, I little thought of all she was to do for me. I answered the advertisement just because mother and the girls stood over me and made me answer all the people who advertised in the *Times* for anything I could do, but I hadn't the least hope of getting it. Then when the General said I should come for a 'month on trial,' they all said he'd send me back at the end like a bad shilling."

"Poor Phyllis!"
 "And then I was afraid of the Sisters. I knew they never liked me, and yet I was obliged to refer people to them."

"Uncle has a most perplexed idea of it; he thought you were teaching in a school."

"Mother made me say I was used to teaching. You know, Nell, I really *did* teach the industrials."

"And now you have come to us," said Nell, kissing her, "and you've nothing to do but be happy."

"It would be delightful; but Nell, are you sure you don't mind?"

"Mind what?"
 "Having me. You see I know everything."

"You know all, and so I need not wear a mask before you," confessed Nell, with a sigh of relief. "I am delighted to have you, only—"

"Only?"

"You must promise never to tell a human creature I am—I mean I was Nell Fortescue."

"Oh, I'll promise directly!"

"Not even Rose?"

"I have written Rose a rapturous letter of gratitude already, and she knows correspondence is not my strong point. She'll not expect to hear from me again for ages. Nell, shall you tell the General?"

"That you are my old friend? Oh, yes, Phyllis! He will be as pleased as I am."

"It seems like a fairy tale!"

"And when did you leave St. Hilda, Phyllis?"

"Last September. I could not help it, really, Nell."

"My dear, you said that before. What was it you could not help which so annoyed the Sisters? They forgave you the rest of the three years you had agreed to remain."

Phyllis sighed.

"You know, Nell, I admire the Sisters awfully. I think they are so very good, but I never had the least idea of becoming one myself."

"My dear Phyllis, no one who had ever seen you would imagine you had."

"Why, do I look so wicked? Well, as I never meant to be a Sister, I saw no harm in amusing myself. Do you remember Mrs. Drake?"

"Perfectly. She was your great aversion."
 "She used to be; but do you know, Nell, that night when you left me to entertain her I quite conquered her heart; the dear old soul took a positive liking for me. From that time she asked to see me whenever she came to the Home, and generally brought me a cake or some sweets, as though I had been one of the industrials."

Nell smiled.

"And did you object?"

"Not in the least. She also took a fancy to invite me to tea every Saturday afternoon. Ah, Nell! it was this which led to my final expulsion from the sacred precincts of St. Hilda's."

"But the Sisters used to believe in Mrs. Drake."

"But it wasn't only Mrs. Drake! The Vicar had a friend who got very fond of coming to see him from Saturday to Monday. It was only polite of the friend to offer to relieve the ancient host of the duty of seeing me home. You remember, Nell, it was one of the rules all the workers who went visiting on Saturday should be home by nine."

"Perfectly."

"Well, the friend had a craze for astronomy, and one luckless evening we studied the stars so attentively, it was nearly eleven before I reached the lodge!"

"Phyllis!"

"You may well say Phyllis! The gates were locked. We had to wander along outside the railings till we found a place low enough for me to climb over."

"And then?"

"No one spoke to me on Sunday. I saw the Vicar's friend in church. I suppose, as I was in my old place as usual, he thought all was right, but it wasn't."

"Was Sister Ida very angry?"

"She 'sent for me' on Monday," said Phyllis, gravely, "and said that after what had happened she shouldn't keep me, as I set a bad example to the industrials (just as if they'd ever had a chance of being taught astronomy, poor little brats!), so she meant to take me home that very day. She was kind enough to say she thought I was not utterly bad, but that I was a great deal too worldly for St. Hilda's; then she repeated that awful phrase about my character needing the discipline of marriage. It was fearful."

"But you went home, and you know, Phyllis, you never really liked being at St. Hilda's?"

"I liked going to tea with Mrs. Drake."
 "And studying astronomy."
 "Yes."
 "Phyllis, are you in earnest?"
 Miss Ward smiled dubiously.
 "I am quite in earnest about liking those astronomy lessons; but as there is not the slightest chance of my having any more, for once, it is a pity I am not in jest."
 "Is he very nice, Phyllis?"
 "Who?"
 "The astronomer."
 Phyllis sighed.
 "He's dark, and very clever, Nell. I suppose he will marry some heiress someday; he is very grand, indeed. I never could understand what brought him to Mrs. Drake's."
 "To see you."

Miss Ward shook her head
 "If that was his inducement he would have followed me to the Parsonage; it's only thirty miles from Marton, and much nearer London. Oh, no! it was only that he was fond of imparting knowledge, and saw I had a taste for astronomy. You mustn't go thinking any nonsense, Nell."

"I won't; but tell me one thing—do you like him?"

"I am afraid so," said Phyllis, dolefully; but as the next moment she was giving Nell a comical history of the Superior's interview with her mother and herself in the rôle of family black sheep, our heroine did not place much faith in Miss Ward's account of her own feelings.

The General was delighted with Phyllis, and declared it was the best thing in the world that she was "in the secret."

"I never had a secret before, you see," he told her, "and I'm always afraid of letting this one out now. Whenever I feel particularly inclined to relieve my feelings I can come to you."

They put up at an hotel near the Champs Elysées, and both the girls were delighted with Paris, but after the first few weeks Nell drooped. The old wistful look came back to her face; it was clear to Phyllis that she found forgetfulness as impossible in France as in England.

"What can I do for her?" demanded the General of Miss Ward, who had taken a firm place in his affections, and had no longer any fears of being sent home like a bad 'shilling. "The child's heart's just broken. I should uncommonly like to shoot Sir Royal!"

"But you can't," said Phyllis, decidedly. "And, besides, I'm sure Nell wouldn't like you to. Shall I tell you what I think would be the best thing in the world?"

"What?"
 "Find out where Sir Royal is."
 "I know that he's at Madchendorf, a horrid little place where he had an attachéship till his father died."

"Then let us go after him."
 "Phyllis!"

"I have heard something of Sir Royal," said Miss Ward, demurely. "I have been told he believes firmly in his wife's death. Now, General Brereton, supposing he is foolish enough to fall in love, and to contemplate a second wedding, Nell—I mean Gladys—would have to reveal herself. She couldn't let him commit bigamy!"

The General wiped the drops from his forehead. This was a calamity he had never dreamed of.

"It's awful! But," as though seized with a sudden hope, "I don't think Charteris is the style of man to fall in love."

"I hope he is."

"Eh?"
 "Don't you see," said Miss Ward, eagerly, "if we all go to Madchendorf we are bound to see Sir Royal!"

"What good will that do?"

"Well, as 'Gladys Weston' is about the loveliest creature he ever beheld, and as he never had a glimpse of Nell Fortescue, what is to hinder him from quite unconsciously falling in love with his own wife?"

The General rubbed his spectacles, and looked at Phyllis with amazed approval.

"My dear!" he said slowly, "you are a wonderful girl! I never should have thought of such a plan myself, but it's the best scheme in the world if only the child consents."

"It's my opinion," said Phyllis, half sadly, "the child, as you call her, would undertake to climb Mont Blanc barefoot if it would give her a sight of Sir Royal Charteris."

"Won't he think it strange our coming?"

"Not the least in the world. Madchendorf is a very favourite German watering place. It's the wrong season of the year for the ladies, but we can put that down to our Britannic ignorance."

She unfolded the scheme to her friend, and the brown eyes lit up with hope.

"If only I could get to know him and we were friends, it would be so nice, Phyllis!"

"My dear child, it wouldn't. You're in that stage of heart disease, Nell, when you must have all or nothing. Just now you've the latter, and feel bad; but, believe me, you'd feel ten times worse if you attempted to content yourself with friendship. It's all very well to be friends with a man if you are quite sure you'll never love him; but, believe me, unless you love someone else it's a great deal safer to steer clear of friendship with the male species."

"You are thinking of the astronomy lessons," said Nell, wistfully.

"Perhaps."

She might have said she was thinking of a passage from the works of that English poet who, amid all his faults, is truest to human nature. She might have told Nell that these lines are as true now as when Byron first conceived them:—

"If free from passion, which all friendship smothereth,
 And your true feeling known and understood,
 No friend like to a woman earth discovers;
 So that you have not been—nor shall be—
 lovers."

CHAPTER XI.

It was the end of March. Even in North Germany spring was breaking, and the long and cold winter seemed almost over.

In the salon taken by General Brereton at the chief hotel of the little town of Madchendorf, his adopted daughter sat alone, a bunch of violets in her hand, her thoughts very far away.

"Almost ten weeks," she whispered to herself; "nearly three months, and we have seen him well-nigh every day. He does not frown on me now; he does not think me a designing mercenary woman now. We are, I suppose, what the world calls friends. In Paris I told Phyllis his friendship would content me, but she was right. Nothing will ever satisfy me but my husband's love, and I do not believe he has love to give."

Others in the little society doubted this. There were many who declared the young Lady Charteris, still reported to be sojourning in the South for her health, would be but little pleased could she see her husband's devotion to the lovely Gladys Weston.

Not that anyone ever criticized the beautiful girl's conduct; all confessed it was modest, unaffected, and maidenly. She did not even seem to know that Sir Royal's eyes followed her perpetually, and that his voice softened in speaking to her as it did to no other creature.

Nell, alone with her violets, and her sad thoughts, little guessed the conversation even then passing between her husband and her friend.

Indeed, Phyllis had fallen in with Sir Royal at the library, and been persuaded, quite accidentally, by him to take a turn in the park.

"You and I seem like old friends, Miss Ward," said Royal, slowly. "I have often wanted to talk to you about myself."

Phyllis lifted her bright eyes to his face. They were not quite so sparkling as they had been before she first heard of the Marton murder, and became indirectly involved in its long chain of consequences; but they were pleasant, kindly eyes still, and Royal liked them.

"I am quite ready to listen," she said, gently.

"I have never felt like a stranger to you since that sad time at Charteris last July."

"I wanted to ask you your true opinion as to my wife's disappearance?"

"You heard it at the time, Sir Royal. I believe she loved you, and left you because she thought you regretted your union."

"And did you wonder I never alluded to her?"

"We are not often alone."

"I did not mean that. Did you not think it strange I suffered people to think she was in the South of France?"

"I had a theory about it. I fancied you let people think that in case Nell ever returned to you, so that no scandal should be busy with your history."

"She never can return to me, poor child. Heaven knows I grieved for her untimely death."

"Dead!" Phyllis started. "How can you think so?"

"I only heard it last night. It came to me from the lips of one I cannot doubt."

He paused, and seemed to weigh his words as though afraid to say too much. "I was told last night by a man who could not be mistaken that my wife, Helena Charteris, was dead."

Phyllis started.

"Who told you?"

"One now gone to his last account, who had wronged, or thought he had wronged, my wife."

Every trace of colour left Phyllis's cheeks. "You can't mean Lord Delamere?" she cried.

"Delamere!" repeated Sir Royal, in his own emotion not seeing her agitation, "he is quite well. I have sent for him about this business."

"What business?"

"My wife's death. Don't you know her life stood between him and the Delamere estates? We must at once search out the truth of the story I have heard."

Phyllis shook her head.

"I don't believe it!"

"Strange!" said Sir Royal. "My own instinct was to distrust it; but he was on his death-bed, and I thought his word must be sacred."

"But he might have mistaken some one else for Nell."

"Hardly!"

"Why not?"

"Because he had the strongest motive in the world to recall her features—fear!"

"Sir Royal! No one could be afraid of Nell. She was too pitiful and kind."

Sir Royal looked at her closely.

"You said that I might trust you!"

"Indeed, you may!"

"You were Nell's friend at the time of our marriage. You know *why* she consented to be my wife?"

"Yes!"

"Did you never wonder who the real murderer was? The man so like me my own servants were puzzled by the resemblance?"

Phyllis shook her head.

"Nell said it was not you. You were acquitted. I never thought about it."

"The murderer was my brother. He is dead now, poor fellow, and I may speak the truth."

"Your brother! But I thought he had been dead for years. The General told us so."

"The General believed what all the world were told. Miss Ward, it is a pitiful story, it sent my father much sooner to the grave. It has entailed on me months of agonized anxiety. Almost three years ago, in a mo-

ment of drunken frenzy, Ralph stabbed Claude Delamere. There was another man present. The secret rested between those two. It would have been far better to have confessed the crime. In his then condition the offence would have been accounted manslaughter. In an evil moment Ralph resolved to keep it secret, and took flight. A few weeks later, unknown to me, my father purchased the silence of the one witness who could prove the crime, and gave out his son's death. It seemed to him and Ralph the best plan. I was written to, but forbidden to come home for the funeral. Mr. Drake read the service over the coffin which was supposed to contain my brother. The whole world believed Ralph Charteris was dead save my father and two trusted servants."

Phyllis gasped.

"But the certificate?"

"I believe some poor fellow died at the time in a remote village, and my father paid the expenses of his funeral on condition the widow allowed the certificate to be made out in my brother's name. I don't know the details; I only learnt the bare facts at my father's death-bed."

"And he—poor Mr. Ralph Charteris?"

"You may well pity him, child. His life has been a living death. He never dared reveal himself to anyone who had known him; he seemed like Cain wandering about with a mark upon his forehead. It was terrible! I can't bear to speak of what I felt when my father told me the truth. I would gladly have persuaded Ralph to leave the country, but he refused. The one affection which seems to have survived the strain of those terrible two years was a love for his birthplace; he would not put the sea between him and Marton Hall."

"Poor fellow!"

"There was a little pavilion in the grounds, built first as a study and then added to by my father. This was Ralph's refuge. Sometimes he would stay there for days together, at others he would be away for months."

"I begin to understand."

"When the present Lord Delamere, in his search for his brother's murderer, lighted on the one witness of the cruel deed, he believed he had found the culprit himself. Delamere has changed very much in these last months; he has told me himself he bitterly regrets the two years he wasted in a wild quest for vengeance. Certainly his researches cost another human life, and brought a terrible trial on me; but in my place, as nearly allied to the man who killed his brother, I cannot blame him."

"John Dalrymple came to me declaring Lord Delamere had offered him a large sum of money if he could produce Claude's murderer. He threatened to betray Ralph if I did not offer him a larger bribe. I refused. It was not that I loved money," went on Sir Royal. "I would have spent every penny I had in my brother's cause, but it seemed to me to begin to bribe John Dalrymple was to attempt to fill a bottomless hole. Already he had had from my father large sums. The man was a drunkard and a gambler; no money could benefit him. If I agreed to this demand he might return anew with a greater. The one, the only course to me seemed to brazen it out. My brother was believed to be dead, his grave could be pointed out. The clergyman who buried him could be produced; it seemed to me that, placed as I was in a cruel strait, I chose the least terrible alternative in defying Dalrymple."

"Don't go on," pleaded Phyllis. "I understand, and it must hurt you so!"

"You can guess the rest. You know, then, that my brother had the strongest possible reason to remember the features of my wife. She had seen him fly red-handed from John Dalrymple's body; and though, as my wife, her testimony could not have been taken against me, it was as available to hang him as a stranger's."

"I see."

"Ralph went to London very soon after her flight. I have never seen him since till, three days ago, he arrived at my lodgings, death written on his face. He had braved all—even the chance of being identified from his resemblance to me. He had risked all just to tell me I was free."

Phyllis was crying. The labyrinth of troubles which encompassed poor Nell seemed so terrible.

No doubt Ralph Charteris was mistaken. He must have been, but how could she (Phyllis) prove it to Sir Royal.

"When did she die? I mean," as the thought of Nell even then awaiting her in their comfortable salon occurred to her, "when did he think she died?"

"There can be no doubt," said Sir Royal, gravely. "It was in October. He met her face to face in the London streets. He recognized her at once; she was poor and wan-looking, but he said he could not be mistaken."

Phyllis was speechless. She knew that Nell had been "found" by General Brereton early in October.

She waited for what was to come.

"He saw her," went on Sir Royal, sadly, "standing on Westminster Bridge. He spoke to her, but she did not heed him. She stood there in the dull night air, not reeking what went on around her. Ralph has seen enough troubles himself to recognize it in others. He says if ever despair was written on a woman's face he saw it stamped upon my wife's."

"And then?"

"He walked away. Remember, he had reason to fear her. He had risked all once by speaking to her, but she took no notice. He went away, and was gone perhaps half an hour. When he returned her shawl was lying on the ground just where she had stood—and she was gone."

"Nonsense!" said Phyllis, sharply. "Your words imply she took her own life. She might have been hard pressed; she might have been broken-hearted, but—she never did that."

"Listen! He tracked her by urgent inquiry to the place where she had lodged. He found the fiend who owned the house had turned her into the streets that day because the time the rent was paid for had expired, and the wretch knew her to be penniless. She left there poor and destitute. She was never seen there again."

"Perhaps she went somewhere else."

"When people are as poor as that, Miss Ward, they cannot hide themselves. She had been selling flowers, poor child! Ralph found the man who supplied her with them; discovered the girls who stood next her in the street. Neither had ever seen her or ever heard of her since that night."

Phyllis looked up at him.

"I can't understand you. Do you want to believe your wife took her life?"

"How can you charge me with such a wish? Heaven knows I would give my whole fortune to bring her back—to give her back her youth and innocence. But, Miss Ward, though I would give my own life for hers, I would prefer any certainty to suspense."

"Suspense can't hurt you," said Phyllis snappishly. "You never loved her."

"But I wronged her," he answered, slowly. "If only I could find her I would show her how bitterly I repent of that great mistake. I would pay her every honour—every respect."

"She would rather have love. Oh! Sir Royal, you don't understand woman. To us love is worth all else."

Sir Royal sighed.

"Love will not come at a man's bidding; may not be given away at his will! If I could find my wife I would cherish her and devote my life to her."

"But you would not love her!"

"What a stress you lay on love! You used to argue there was no such thing."

"We all make mistakes sometimes, Sir Royal. My two greatest friends would have deemed the world itself lost for love. Perhaps they have converted me."

"Your first friend was my wife."

"And my second is Gladys Weston. Dear little Nell you never saw, but you know Miss Weston well. I confess I have one great quality, Sir Royal. I know how to choose my friends."

Then he asked her a strange question.

"Does she know?"

"Miss Weston? Oh, yes! I told her Nell's story before I had been a week in the General's house. She cried over it."

"And thinks me a monster!"

"She thinks you both cruelly dealt with. She said once she would do anything in the world to see you happy together."

He shook his head.

"I don't think happiness is for me, Miss Ward. I see nothing ahead but trouble."

"Gladys always says 'hope on, hope ever,' when I mourn over her troubles."

"Has she any troubles?"

"Indeed she has."

Sir Royal looked furious.

"I should like to wring the neck of anyone who made her suffer!"

"You are as bad as the dear old General. He said to me before we came here, 'I should like to shoot that young man, Phyllis.'"

"Then there is a young man?"

"I can't betray my friend's secrets. Gladys has a love-story, and I see not the slightest chance of its ending happily unless someone does something soon. Now the only two proposals of summary measures are the General's, to shoot the unlucky gentleman, and your milder wish to wring his neck. Really I don't see how either would help Gladys."

"He must be a brute if he does not love her."

"Do you know I fancy he worships her."

"Then why aren't they engaged?"

"I rather think they fancy themselves engaged, but, Sir Royal, we shall never invited to their wedding."

"Must you go?" as she came to a full stop, and put out her hand.

"I fear so. Sir Royal, don't think me hard-hearted. Indeed, indeed, I sympathize with you deeply, and am grieved for your brother's death."

Royal Charteris sighed.

"He needs no regrets, poor fellow! If ever death came as a happy release it came so to Ralph. We were boys together, and yet I cannot sorrow that 'after life's fitful fever' he sleeps well."

"Nell!" cried Phyllis Ward, rushing into her friend's own room and calling her by a name whose sound had not been heard before since they came to Madchendorf. "Nell, you have won your prize. Sir Royal Charteris is desperately in love with you, and about as miserable as he can be."

Nell looked up with a faint pink in her cheeks.

"Are you sure, Phyllis? He hasn't been here for three whole days."

"His brother has been with him. Poor Ralph only died last night!" and then she poured out the story just as she had heard it.

"And he thinks me dead?"

"He believes so."

"And wishes it?"

"No. I think he would like to find you and overwhelm you with respectful care and attentions. He would give to Lady Charteris all the treasures at his command."

"Except his heart!"

"And that having stepped into Miss Gladys Weston's safe keeping he can't very well reclaim it to bestow it elsewhere."

"Phyl, be serious."

"I am," said Phyllis, stoutly; "and Nell, your cousin is coming on Monday."

"Whatever for?"

"To help Sir Royal prove the fact of your death. I believe!"

"Uncle wants to go home on Monday, but there is really no hurry. We are all to be at Westminster by the end of April to keep Poppe's first birthday; but we could stay here a month longer, and yet do that!"

"Lord Delamere is sure to recognise you."
"I don't know! Edwin only saw me three times after Claude's death, and he is not at all clever."

She had gone too far.

"He is wonderfully clever!" declared Phyllis. "I never saw anyone with such a genius for astronomy." And then, perceiving she had betrayed herself, Miss Ward stamped her foot, and said Nell was horrid.

"I'm not!" said Nell, penitently, "and I'm very glad. I mean I shall be when you are Lady Delamere."

"That will be never!" said Phyllis, calmly. "He didn't make love to me; he taught me about the stars!"

"Perhaps he can teach you some more about them while he is here," returned Nell, demurely.

"There is something else he can do," retorted Phyllis. "I think he is sure to talk on me. Let me tell him the secret, and then he can calmly observe to Sir Royal that he has heard you are in Madchendorf!"

Nell took Phyllis' hand, and looked at her beseechingly.

"Are you quite sure?"

"My dear child! If ever I saw a man in love, and I have witnessed I don't know how many courtships—if I ever read of a man in love, and I've read novels by the dozen, why, then, Royal Charteris is in love with you. Only say the word, and I will make your cousin do the revealing at any moment."

But after all, Phyllis could not carry out the scheme quite as she had planned it. Lord Delamere arrived more promptly than he had been expected. He found Sir Royal Charteris returning from the funeral of the brother whom the world believed to have been lying in his grave for nearly three years. And after the first greeting, after his simple assurance that the dead man's memory was safe from him, he said suddenly, "It must have been very awkward for you, my cousin being here!"

"Your cousin!"

"I hardly know what other name to give her. Is she with you? Have you been reconciled, and are you enjoying a kind of deferred honeymoon at this dreary German place, or is my first surmise correct, and Miss Nell disappointing herself here on her own account?"

"I did not know she was here. I believed she was dead. My chief reason for summoning you was to ask what proofs of her death would be needed before you could take possession of Delamere?"

Edwin shook his hand warmly.

"It was like you to think of that; but, Charteris, I have ceased to break the tenth commandment. I no longer covet other men's goods (or other women's either). I find my scientific papers meet with a good market. I have the promise of an under-secretaryship, and really things look so flourishing with me that I am contemplating matrimony if the lady will smile on me."

Sir Royal sighed.

"Better a wife you love even than your ancestral estate. But I think you will have both, for I fear my wife is, indeed, dead, and you are deceived by some fancied resemblance."

"I was never mistaken in a face yet. Besides, she turned as white as death when she caught sight of me."

"Was she alone?"

"She was standing at the door of a shop, evidently waiting till her friends had finished their purchases. I will swear to her identity anywhere."

"But who is she with? I feared, poor girl, she was in great distress, even when I last heard of her."

"She wore furs fit for a duchess. I suppose there is a visiting list or something of the sort to be had?"

Sir Royal shook his head.

"Everyone calls on everyone. She must have come within the last three days, or I should have met her. I have seen no strangers since poor Ralph came."

"Are there many English here?"

"A fair number. That girl who went with your cousin to Marton Hall is here as companion to the young lady."

"Phyllis Ward! I meant to go down to her father's village and see her, for she disappeared suddenly from St. Hilda's."

"She is very happy here."

A suspicion of the truth came to Edwin.

"What are the people like she is with?"

"General Brereton; you must have met. His niece, or rather, adopted daughter, is the loveliest woman I ever saw!"

"Has she golden brown hair, dark, velvety brown eyes, a very fair complexion, and a generally fragile appearance?"

"Yes, you have described her to the life!"

"Oh! then I have met her too. Are you on visiting terms with the General's party?"

"I am very friendly with them."

"And you admire Miss—"

"Everyone must admire Miss Weston."

"I think it is a good thing Lady Charteris has appeared upon the scene," said Edwin, gravely, "for I gather your admiration for Miss Weston is of no ordinary kind."

Sir Royal shook his head.

"I love her as I think a man loves but once in life, but even if I had seen my wife's grave I could never have asked Gladys to marry me."

"Why not?"

"Think of her youth and innocence, and the dark secrets of my life! Remember what my brother was! Think of the terrible accusations brought against myself, and how I unconsciously wrecked your cousin's life!"

"I should like to go and call on the General. Will you come with me, or after to-day's sad ceremony is it unkind to ask you?"

"I will come gladly," said Sir Royal. "While I can keep my secret," with a sad smile, "I do Miss Weston no wrong by visiting her."

The two gentlemen were shown into the salon, the German waiter announcing Sir Royal, but ignoring Edwin, who did not give his name.

It was a long, rambling room, opening at one end on to a balcony. The General was out, but the two girls sat reading. Both rose to welcome Sir Royal, but both started on recognising his companion.

Lord Delamere was very quick. Before they had recovered from their surprise he took Nell's little hand in his, and said to Royal Charteris,—

"I told you awhile ago I was never mistaken in a face. I fear you cannot say as much. This young lady whom I fancy you have known as Miss Weston is my first cousin, Helena Gladys, and also your wife, Lady Charteris!"

He waited for nothing more, but turned to Phyllis.

"Miss Ward," he said, gravely, "you used to have a taste for astronomy; won't you take me on to the balcony and let me see if the stars are as interesting at Madchendorf as we used to find them in Highshire?"

But they did not study astronomy that evening, neither did they bestow much interest or thought upon the two they had left in the salon.

Edwin looked at Phyllis seriously, and asked,—

"Why did you run away from St. Hilda's?"

"They said I was too worldly."

"What a terrible disaster—and are you?"

"I suppose so. I don't think I want to go back."

"And where will you go when Nell makes up her quarrel with her husband?"

"They never quarrelled."

"Well, where will you go when he takes her home in triumph to The Hall?"

"Back to the Parsonage, I suppose," with a tremor in her voice, "until I find someone else who wants a *congé amore*."

"I can tell you of someone now. Phyllis, will you be my companion, and my wife? I would have asked you months before, only

until I got a post through the Government I was pretty well too poor to keep myself, much less a second self."

"But—"

"I am not particularly well off now. You'll have to be Lady Delamere of nowhere, and the very poorest peeress in England, but I don't think you'll mind that, little girl; and I'll take care of you and never let you feel the 'discipline of marriage' the Sisters used to threaten you with."

"But do you really like me?"

"Something more than like. Do you know, Phyllis, you have made a fresh man of me? I was not much better than a vengeance-hunting madman till I met you."

She shivered.

"Ah! sweetheart!" said Lord Delamere, sadly, "for two years I neglected my duty—every human instinct, and like some savage animal pursued my prey. I was unworthy of a wife's love then. Phyllis, I am unworthy still, only I love you, dear; and with you by my side I don't think I shall relapse into a machine again."

But Phyllis was eager in his defence.

"It was cruelly hard on you. He was your only brother."

"Ay, but what good could vengeance do him in his grave? Do you know, John Dalrymple's death, the fearful charge against Sir Royal, and the awful misery which might have come out of Nell's marriage, one and all are the fault of my insatiable revenge?"

Phyllis was crying softly.

"But you cried from love."

"Selfish love; a very different feeling from the affection which was shown by the poor little wail whose evidence brought about Sir Royal's acquittal."

"The child who brought the watch"

"Yes; it seems John Dalrymple once saved her life, and she and 'Gentleman Jack' had been sworn friends ever since. She never went back to London after the murder; she lingered about at Marton doing errands for the neighbours, and picking up a living somehow. One morning last December—one cold winter's morning—they found Popsy lying on her friend's grave, quite dead."

Phyllis sobbed afresh.

"You must not, my sweetheart!" urged Lord Delamere in a brighter tone; "or I shall fancy you are regretting your promise."

"But I haven't promised anything?"

"Only to be my wife."

"Lord Delamere?" suggested Phyllis, demurely, a few minutes after; "don't you think Nell and Sir Royal must be wondering very much what has become of us?"

"I don't believe they have remembered our existence," retorted her lover; "but you will take cold if you stay here in the night air any longer, so I don't mind allaying their anxiety by taking you back to them."

"Nell," said Phyllis, wickedly, as she crept up to Nell's side; "would you kindly tell us what to call you. Shall it be Nell Fortescue, or Miss Weston, or Lady Charteris?"

Nell looked at her husband.

"I don't mind which," he said, fondly, "so that she remembers she has another title, and that she is my wife."

"Wasn't I right?" inquired Phyllis, "when I told you that you and I could never be invited to Nell's wedding?"

"Phyllis shall ask you to ours by way of compensation," said Lord Delamere, gaily. "Nell, you have not had much cause to be fond of your cousins, but I know you will be grateful to me for the one I am giving you now."

Even the General, when all the explanations and confidences had been gone through again for his special benefit—being a benevolent old gentleman—he was delighted at his girl's happiness, and did not bawl his own approaching loneliness.

"I shall have to adopt Fred's baby," he said, gravely. "She can't find a husband yet awhile. Lord Delamere, I congratulate you



[THE GIRLS STARTED ON RECOGNIZING SIR ROYAL'S COMPANION.]

heartily. You must be married from my house at home?"

"I'd rather be married here," said Edwin, ungratefully. "Phyllis is of age, and none of her relations have been very nice to her. If you will give her away, sir, the English chaplain shall perform the ceremony, and she shall return to England as Lady Delamere."

"We can be married the same day," suggested Royal. "No, that's not what I mean. I was going to say we could begin our honeymoon the same day."

And they did. The very afternoon that Lord and Lady Delamere started for Berlin Sir Royal and his wife set out for Marton Hall; and there the bride, who had once entered her husband's house a lonely stranger, crushed with a heavy sorrow, was brought home by him with every sign of the truth she now knew so well that he loved her as his own life. No matter if people did hint ill-naturedly sometimes the first months of Sir Royal's marriage had been a failure, no one could possibly look at him and his wife together without confessing they were devoted to each other.

Mrs. Ward and her younger daughters were almost electrified when they received the wedding-cards and piece of cake Lord Delamere directed to them.

"You know," wrote the happy young wife, "you all wanted me to settle, and I have obeyed you, though not quite perhaps as you intended. Edwin says we are terribly poor for a peer and peeress, but we are richer than I ever dreamed of, and if he hadn't a farthing we should be happy. I shall be thankful all my days I went to St. Hilda's, or I might never have met my husband."

Her gratitude took the form of a huge wedding cake for the express benefit of the industrials.

Sister Joan acknowledged it on a post-card; but the intended recipients never tasted it, it was far too worldly an indulgence. Instead, it was disposed of cheap to a confectioner at

Blakesleigh, who retailed wedding-cake by the pound; and with the proceeds Sister Joan purchased twelve yards of gingham for pinafores. The industrials wore the pinafores, and so in a sense derived benefit from Lady Delamere's liberality, but it is my belief they would have preferred the cake.

St. Hilda's flourishes. Four new Sisters have joined the community, and one of them is Mrs. Delamere's eldest daughter. There are several new workers also, but to my mind not one of them have the winning ways of Phyllis Ward, and not one of them the sweet temper and patience of the lonely child who is now Lady Charteris of Marton. Lady Charteris pays visits to St. Hilda's sometimes. She is, indeed, one of the most generous subscribers to the community; but Sir Royal has never been admitted to another interview with the Superior. He used at first to call with his wife, but then an excuse was always made for Sister Ida. Then, remembering that interview with her father long ago, Sir Royal understands that in spite of the vows she has taken, in spite of the garb she wears, in spite of her having advocated his marriage, it may be that the stately Sister Ida does not care to look upon his wedded happiness. Certainly, since their happy home-coming the April after their wedding, he and Nell have never stood together in the presence of the Superior. He never speaks of this idea, never even to Nell; but one summer's day, more than a year after that meeting at Madchendorf, the Superior paid a visit to the Hall, her first and last. It was when Nell held her first-born in her arms—a boy, with his father's eyes!

Sister Ida had come to congratulate the new-made mother. She took the baby in her arms, but she did not praise its beauty. She kept him some minutes pressed close to her heart; then she laid him down—and Nell saw the tears in her eyes. From that moment Lady Charteris understood fully the Superior's secret.

Mrs. Delamere did not long survive her son's marriage. Her death gave a small fortune to each of her children. Marion joined St. Hilda's. Her sisters married, so that Phyllis had not to welcome any third party to her happy home. For five years Lord and Lady Delamere lived in a happy *à la vie*. Then there came to them a little daughter, whom the father, with his wife's full consent, declared must be christened "Posy!"

Posy, at present, is an only child. She is supposed already to reign with sovereign sway over the heart of Nell's eldest boy—a curly-headed urchin, quite four years her senior. Already the two mothers plan a marriage between their children; indeed, it seems to Nell and to Sir Royal a kind of poetic justice that Lord Delamere's little girl should one day possess the estate of which his grandfather deprived him. And as Brereton must be the master of the Court some day Posy can only possess it as his wife.

The General lives, still hale and hearty. He spoils all the children of his young friends, Posy most of all.

As to Nell, her lonely childhood, her sad youth are forgotten. Now in her great happiness she knows her husband loves her better than night beside, and that not even the promise to his father, which brought such terrible anxiety, caused him more sorrow than the harsh judgment of herself, which sent her forth a fugitive from his home, which even now he speaks of sometimes as "His Great Mistake."

[THE END]

It contributes greatly towards a man's moral and intellectual health to be brought into habits of companionship with individuals unlike himself, who care little for his pursuits, and whose sphere and abilities he must go out of himself to appreciate.



[“DETECTIVE PRATT, FROM SCOTLAND YARD!” GASPED LADY RANSOME.]

NOVELETTE.]

A BEAUTIFUL MEDUSA.

—:—

CHAPTER VI.

THE courage that had sustained Kate so wonderfully under her terrible ordeal, gave way when she found herself in her own apartment, under the sympathising, motherly care of good old Betsy.

“You positively take my breath away,” gasped Betsy, on hearing of the scene in the sick room. “Not his wife? Why, there’s proof! Ain’t he your boy’s father?”

“Perhaps it was only a sham marriage, Betsy?” Kate said, brokenly.

“That’s for him to prove, not you, my poor darling. It’s as well your dear mother went to her rest when she did; this would have broken her heart.”

“Ah, me! Betsy! the sin of deceit and disobedience has found me out. I threw aside the love of a good man for one who has proved himself a monster of cruelty.”

“You are his wife! Never mind what he says,” protested Betsy, warmly; “and he can’t wriggle out of it if you stand firm. If I was in your place I’d put countess on my cards, and let him dare to say you have no right to do it. You have plenty of money and a true, loyal friend in Mr. Osborne. Write to him at once and strike this villain down before he has time to plot against you. Mark my words, that woman, for she is no lady, will stop at nothing to get rid of you—not even at murder. I could see it in her spiteful face and blazing eyes.”

“I will fight for honour’s sake,” cried Kate, drying her eyes, “and my boy’s birthright. I will let the world know I am Countess of Crondace. I am a woman, a mother now, made strong, brave by suffering, and he must do me justice; aye, even if I spend every

penny I possess. I will write to George Osborne at once, and beg of him to assist me in obtaining my legal rights. Lawyers like delay. I feel that I must put the matter to a speedy test, or lose my reason.”

“There’s a dear, brave lady, worthy daughter of Captain Karson, who died in trying to save one of his own men. Providence sent that villain here, crushed him almost at your very door, and will give you the strength and power to crush him again.”

“I should like to see him by himself, to meet him alone, to reason with him, to plead for justice for my boy. He was too much of a coward to own it before that woman. Why, she had power over me from the first, and I did not shake it off until she touched my honour to the quick.”

“I wouldn’t trust myself alone with him,” Betsy protested. “A man that would take away his wife’s character would also take her life. Let others deal with him, my dear. You haven’t the strength to undergo such another trouble as you have already undergone.”

“No; I must and will see him, Betsy,” she said, firmly. “As my husband, it is my duty to give him a chance of repenting ere I proclaim him in the blackest colours before the whole world. I do not wish my son to be ashamed of his father.”

Though usually gentle and retiring, Kate, when roused, as she was now thoroughly, could evince a will and resolution no one would dream of her possessing.

Everything was at stake, even to her husband’s name, a proud one, and his honour too, if indeed such a man, judged by the past, could be said to have ever had so noble a principle.

Since the time of his leaving her roof he had not written or made any advances in the direction of explaining his inexplicable conduct, which was another proof of his determination to repudiate the marriage contract.

At first she almost felt glad at being freed from such a man, but her boy had to be con-

sidered, and she put aside all womanly pride for his sake.

She simply drove to Crondace House, and sent up her card as Mrs. R. Lonsdale.

To her astonishment she was admitted instantly, and shown into the library, where she found the earl.

“I expected you, Kate,” he commenced, in a conciliatory tone, placing a chair for her in his wonted courteous fashion.

“You did?” she answered, impulsively, auguring hopefully from these words.

“Yes; it is better that we should understand each other.”

“In what way can that end be accomplished? Our present embarrassing position admits of only one solution—justice to me and our child!”

“You are inexperienced in the ways of the world, Kate. Sometimes passion gets the upper hand of prudence, as in our case.”

“I will not continue the discussion if you pursue this ambiguous course,” she objected, warmly. “Am I your wife or not?”

“In one sense, yes; but, in the eyes of the law, no!” he answered, stolidly.

“And you dare tell me that!” she exclaimed, a rosy flush dyeing her cheeks. “Where is my marriage certificate? Produce it, and let it speak for itself. I will not permit you to be the only judge in such a vital question as this. Have you no sense of justice—no pity; no remorse, Richard Lonsdale, to thus throw back in my teeth an innocent girl’s trust, who, loving you and believing you a noble man, left home, mother, friends, and the love of a good, true, honest man to cast in her lot with you as your wife?”

“Remorse, yes; before Heaven I admit it, Kate. If my life could undo what I have done I would willingly forfeit it.”

“Let the proofs speak for themselves. I am here to defend my innocent child from a foul stigma. Surely you do not wish to brand yourself as one of the vilest of men. Has that woman so enthralled, fascinated you, that you

forget all honour, and proclaim a peer of the realm to be a villain? Think well of it, Richard, before it is too late, for I tell you that I will fight for my honour's sake to the bitter end!"

"Would you incur the world's scorn, Kate?"

"Scorn! why scorn! I have done no wrong to society. Tell me what you intend doing, and quickly?"

"You are not my wife!"

"Not your wife! Who is, then?"

"No one, as yet."

"Mark me well, my noble Earl. From this moment we are at war. I shall assume the title of Countess of Orondeace publicly. It is for you to sue me if I am wrong."

"Kate, don't do anything so mad!"

"I have nothing further to say to you, except this, I am richer—richer than you can have any conception of—and will carry my case, ay, to the foot of the throne itself to obtain justice. Your dastardly words have killed the love I felt for you. O! how I prayed interceded with tears, that you might be spared when in the silent watches of the night I hung over your couch battling with death's angel for your life, thanking Heaven for having given me the sweet task of being your ministering angel. All the old love came back to me and you. How have you repaid me?"

"For pity's sake cease, Kate. You harrow up my very soul itself."

"Harrow! Why, you do not know what misery and torture I endured when returning to my humble home. I found my dying mother unable to tell me that I was forgiven. Then came biting poverty; and why did I suffer all this? For your sake—for your sake!"

"Cannot we arrive at a compromise?" he asked, eagerly.

"Yes, in one way, and in one only. You say our marriage was not legal. Let us be married afresh!"

"Impossible," he said, emphatically.

"I am answered, but not crushed. You will find that the law can reach you, and society thrust you out from its midst as it would a leper. I came here for peace, to give you a chance of redeeming your name and honour, only to find that you esteem both so little as to refuse me justice."

Without waiting for his reply she swept out of the room, leaving him in a state of mind which few could envy.

"How lovely she looked!" he murmured, "so like her old sweet self, but more beautiful; and yet I cannot wrench from my heart Bertie, my first love, my queenly-imperious siren. To lose her now she is free would be worse than death; and yet I may find that I have riveted chains from which I cannot free myself."

He paced the room in a perfect fever of mingled emotions, battling against the still small voice of conscience, and all too successfully, ambition conquering principle and every dictate of honour.

That Kate was wealthy was of no moment to him. She lacked blue blood, and was of the people; while Bertie (his pet name for Lady Ransome) was descended from kings, and would grace his proud position as Earl of Orondeace.

That night he tossed and tumbled on his bed of down, which to him seemed a bed of thorns.

But at last he sunk into a troubled sleep, in which was re-enacted all that had passed within the eventful last few weeks.

Then a horror fell upon him, for he stood at the brink of a stagnant pool, the wide, black silent water hemmed in by trees, but surrounded by a close ring of dark-coloured earth, uncovered by any greenness of grass or weed; along the brink grew clumps of tall, lank reeds, sighing mournfully as the wind whistled through them like an invisible Pan.

Suddenly he was in the presence of some awful being, who, with long bony finger,

pointed to the Stygian blackness, and from out the dark waters arose the face of a human being.

Then came these words:—

"Beware of ambition's lust, of injustice to the living, lest the dead should drag you down to unutterable depths of shame and woe."

With a stifled shriek and a moan he awoke, shivering like one afflicted with palsy, a dank, cold perspiration rolling off his forehead in great beads, as if the vision had harrowed up his very soul, and brought him face to face with his inner self, in all its black deformity.

How he longed for a gleam of the dawn to dispel the awful gloom that seemed to envelop him in a sable shroud!

And although physically brave, yet he would not for a king's ransom have left his bed to strike a light.

It was only a dream, but that awful figure, shapely as some hideous phantom, intangible as the vain seemed to be at his side still, and ever and anon came that white, pitiless face, as if to scorch him of murder, foul and wrong.

At last the welcome silver dawn streamed through the window, and with it, as if from before Chanticleer's proud challenge, fled the spirit of black night.

"Is this a warning?" he thought, as he arose, and staggering like an inebriate, laved his face, head, and temples in cold water, as if to wash out the remembrance of that fearsome vision. "I will do justice. Bertie will help me to right a wrong. She cannot hold me to my promise. Oh! that we had never met only to make each others' lives a misery!"

A few hours later he was waiting in the drawing-room for the woman who had enslaved him, resolute, as he thought, to throw off her yoke, and be free to render justice to Kate.

It was a mighty battle he was fighting, and angels must have wished him victory; but she entered, and at the sight of her—of her matchless beauty and queenly grace, and soft, winning smiles—half his good resolves deserted him, and he was happy—merely because he was in her presence.

A costly morning robe of satin hung round her, its hue rivaling the pink shade in mother-of-pearl; soft lace in profusion peeped from beneath the skirt, where gleamed two tiny satin slippered feet, whose high-arched instep, cased by the pearly silk stockings, quite ravished his senses.

Everything in the room was in harmony with her magnificent *tout ensemble*, and proclaimed her to be a woman who would shine in the world as a star of the first magnitude, and would strive by every means, both fair and false, to retain her position against all rivalry.

The air, heavy with fragrance distilled by countless flowers and aromatic plants, steeped his senses in a flood of voluptuous delights.

No wonder that this queenly woman, a very Semiramis, dwarfed the lesser light of sweet Kate, who, when contrasted with her, seemed a scraph by the side of a fallen archangel.

"Bertie, dear Bertie! I have come to sue to you for freedom, to say a last good-bye."

"No, no! I cannot, will not, give you up!" she cried in wailing accents, fringed with despair. Think of what I suffered in all those years when I was a wife in name but not in heart, of how bravely I kept my wifely vows! And now that I am free, and the cup of bliss at my lips, you, the man I love, wish to dash it away ruthlessly, and why? Because of that doll with the face of a child, soulless, a mere automaton—a something to pet one moment, and be sickened by the next."

Her midnight eyes, unfathomable as that dark pool of his dream, were fixed upon him; and, basilisk-like, held him spell-bound, entranced, and seemed to draw his very will out of him.

"Bertie, I do love you; but oh! how can I escape from the toils which I, in a foolish moment, in an idle hour, wound round me, because I thought you were lost to me for ever, and I was only plain Richard Lonsdale?"

"Be brave; crush her by defiance, contempt, ridicule! Why should she stand between you and I, and a love hallowed by years of separation—of suffering? Is she your wife in reality?"

"Yes!" he said, brokenly.

"Oh, Heavens! what do I hear!" she almost hissed in the intensity of her passion. "But it must not, shall not be; she has dared to cross my path. Let her beware of my anger."

And in a moment her soft rounded arms were clinging round his neck, and her head resting on his breast; while tears of passionate despair rained down from her eyes, as she moaned,

"Mine, mine—only mine forever!"

He was startled, alarmed, almost terrified by this outburst, for he could see that hers was a nature that when it could not warn and protest, would blight and destroy a perfect volcano of fierce, unquenchable passion, which had now burst its bonds, and was hurrying them both to possible destruction.

"Bertie, calm yourself! I will not give you up without a struggle," he said, coolly.

"You dare not!" she said, looking up, suddenly, "together we sink or swim. A love like mine cannot be thwarted. Rather than see her acknowledged as your wife I would plunge a dagger in her heart, and myself after."

"Come, come Bertie, my southern Queen, don't let us dream of anything but love!" he rejoined, soothingly. "We will find some way of escape from the meshes of this net; let us go abroad, and live only for each other."

In a moment her arms unwound themselves, and springing to her feet, she stood before him like an outraged empress, exclaiming,—

"No! Only as your wife will I take my place at your side."

"But what if she should discover the truth and the proofs?" he asked, in dire perplexity, for there was no reasoning with her in her present mood.

"Of what use are proofs when she would not be alive?"

"No, no! do not tempt me, Bertie, or yourself, with these wild, unholy imaginings. Be patient, and all yet may be well."

"Patient! As well preach that to the idle winds as to me. Only a few weeks back I thought myself, and was—the happiest of women, and now the veriest wretch in all creation is not so wretched as I. I have men at my feet, but I spurn them all for your sake. And all those years, when my heart was widowed by separation, my one thought was that some day death would sever my hateful bonds; and Heaven, more merciful than man, did give me back my freedom, although I was enveloped in robes of mourning to please society, yet my heart laughed—nay! thrilled with delight; and yet you tell me that I cannot become your wife, and wish me to be what you dared not make her?"

"By Heaven! you wrong me, Bertie. It would be a Paradise to live near you; to see you daily, to know that, in spite of marriage laws, our hearts were wedded. I would not bring the world's scorn upon you, not to ensure my soul's salvation."

"And are you mad enough to picture such a life as that to me? I have wealth, beauty, talents, and would shine as the sun does in the heavens proudly; and not take a position such as you, in your cowardice, would doom me to. No, you will never see me again in life, unless you now decide, once and for ever between that doll and me!"

"My choice is made, Bertie; you, not she, are the idol of my heart. Come what will, the die is cast; but I counsel prudence, because you and I are standing on the brink of a precipice, over which one false step might precipitate us."

"What then? Love such as ours cannot be quenched by death, but is as undying as the soul itself. Here it exists but a brief span; there it is immortal, eternal; and I would brave a thousand deaths for your sake."

What power had he to quell or conquer such a being as this? And all too late, he saw the terrible consequences of that hasty marriage; the rocks of Scylla on the one side, those of Charybdis on the other, both threatening dire destruction to his hopes; and there was no more miserable man in the world at that moment than the Earl of Crondace.

CHAPTER VII.

POOR Kate, in spite of all her courageous resolves, found that the tension on her nerves was getting too much for her to bear; and, after all, she had a green spot in her heart for the man she had once devotedly, distractedly loved—the very opposite in nature to Lady Ransome. She loathed the idea of inflicting pain and shame on any human being, however culpable they might be, and this feeling was intensified when punishment was to overtake the father of her boy.

Betsy saw her pining and fretting, as in the days of old at Mill Hill, and longed for the coming of George Osborne, who had been written to.

"Cheer up, dear child!" she used to chirrup, in the hope of rousing Kate from her despondency, but all in vain; for sickness, the result of cruel anxiety, overtook her; and then it became necessary to obtain a housekeeper, for Betsy had her hands full in attending to mother and child.

So an advertisement was inserted in one of the dailies, and by a strange ordering of fate it fell under the notice of Lady Ransome, who had a vacancy in her household, and was conning over the advertisement sheet.

"Apply to Mrs. Lonsdale!" her ladyship read out. "Why, it is her address! If only I could introduce someone into the position, who would play the part of spy for me, all would be well. I should then know her intentions."

Of a daring nature, the idea once conceived was promptly acted upon; and touching a bell, she directed the servant to send Hester Routh to her.

"You sent for me, my lady?" said a wheedling, soft voice, as Hester Routh entered the room—a fair woman of about thirty, with a smile on her face, but a want of it in the eyes, which had a nasty, stealthy furtive look about them, as if she were casting about for something to pounce upon.

"Yes, Hester; sit down. I want you to do me a service."

"Your ladyship knows my devotion to you. Am I not happy and honoured in being your foster-sister?"

"I have an enemy, Hester; one who is making my very existence wretched. She is in want of a housekeeper. Could you try for the place?"

"For what purpose, my lady?" was the cautious question.

"To intercept letters, to make copies of them for me; that is all."

"I will undertake to try my best; but what is to be done about my references. I cannot, I presume, apply to you under the circumstances?"

"That can be arranged. Proceed to this address at once," writing it down rapidly. "I think you can obtain the situation—at least you can but try. If you succeed you will be handsomely rewarded. Come to me before you start, and the address of a lady will be waiting for you, whom you must say you have been serving for three years."

In a very short time she reappeared in a neat grey cashmere gown, a soft woollen shawl of the same shade draping her shoulders; a fine white straw bonnet trimmed with grey velvet finished the costume, and made her look the best ideal of a superior housekeeper.

"There's such a nice quaker-like looking body applying for the situation, my dear!" said Betsy, later on that morning. "She's

the best one as yet, if looks go for anything."

"Let me see her," Kate said, listlessly. "I am tired already with seeing so many."

When Hester entered her presence Kate's face lit up, for an instant, with satisfaction, for she thought she should like the neat, staid, grey-clad woman.

All was arranged very quickly between them pending the reference, which, being satisfactory, Hester Routh entered Kate's service, ostensibly as a housekeeper, but in reality as a snake in the grass.

The new housekeeper won golden opinions, and soon became an especial favourite with Kate.

"No news and a month elapsed, Hester?" said Lady Ransome, querulously.

"Yes, but I have something at last, my lady. See, here is the correct copy!"

Almost snatching the missive she read—

"Malta, —

"My dear Mrs. Lonsdale, — I am not surprised to learn that your husband has turned out a scoundrel. I never credited him with being anything else. My eyes were open while yours were blinded. I shall start for England by the next mail steamer, and will leave no stone unturned to prove your title as his wife, although Heaven knows it would be better for you to find that you were not tied for life to one so heartless, so devoid of all honour. The marriage certificate can no doubt be procured. If he has married you in a false name it will be all the worse for him.

"Ever your earnest friend and well-wisher,

"GEORGE OSBORNE."

"P.S.—I think it would be a good plan for you to wait a little while before assuming the title of countess. From what you have told me you must be on your guard against Lady Ransome, but I will soon be near you to protect and advise you.—G. O."

"Dangerous!" she laughed fiendishly, a steely glitter in her eyes, and a cruel expression about her mouth. "How dangerous he can never guess. The campaign has commenced in earnest at last, and I am glad of it."

"You are pleased I see, my lady?" Hester ventured to remark.

"Yes, because I know something of her intentions; and taking out her gold-and-pearl portemonnaie, she gave the spy some gold, saying, "This is only an earnest of my future intentions!"

Meanwhile poor Kate became worse, and was under the doctor's hands, who advised her to go abroad for change of air and scene, as her disorder was of a nervous character principally.

She only shook her head, and said plainly,—

"Business of importance will chain me here for months, perhaps. I fancy rest and quiet for a week or two will help me to get about again."

But despite all the efforts of a really clever physician she seemed to lose strength daily and to pine away, fading like a withered flower.

"Hist, come quietly, the household are all gone upstairs to their rooms; but Mrs. Batten is as sharp as a ferret," whispered Hester under her breath, as she led Lady Ransome to her room in the pitch darkness.

"Is she very ill, Hester?" her ladyship asked, eagerly, with an unusual pallor in her face.

"Yes, very."

"Perhaps she will die!" she rejoined, huskily.

"I hope not, for she is very gentle and kind, even to me who has been her foe."

"You must let me go to her room, Hester. I want to find some papers of vital consequence to me. You say she keeps her writing-desk beside her bed?"

"Cannot I get them for you? It would be

risky of you to attempt anything so dangerous yourself."

"Nonsense! I know best. Besides, I dare not divulge to you what the papers are. They concern one who is dear to me. Is she very wakeful?"

"No! I think you will find her asleep, my lady; but I do not like this business at all. She might recognize you, or give an alarm; and then all would be lost, and what would become of me?"

"I can and will protect you, Hester. There is nothing to be nervous about. I shall be as noiseless as any ghost; and, if she awakes, I can easily escape. Sick people, you know, have strange fancies, and if she mentions the matter you can easily persuade her she was mistaken."

Hester, seemingly convinced, showed her to the door of Kate's chamber, where she left her with a shudder which she could not repress.

Like a spirit of evil she glided forward into the dimly-lighted room, a look of exultant hate on her face, whose deadly pallor was heightened by her ghastly black robes, unrelieved by a single gleam of colour.

She looked keenly at Kate, who lay on her side sleeping quietly—her golden hair falling in waves on the snowy pillow—a perfect picture of innocent repose—little dreaming of the serpent that had invaded the spot with deadly intent.

"She will sleep more quietly presently!" Lady Ransome muttered; "the drug will escape detection. It is sure and deadly in its work. It is her life or mine. I fight for love, and will not be balked. She was a fool to pit her puny strength against mine!"

She seemed like a black avenging spirit as she stood there, listening with bated breath for any sound that might break upon the awful stillness that reigned in the house, where all was as silent as the grave.

Swiftly she took from her pocket a small phial, and, uncorking the medicine bottle that stood on a side-table, she poured a few drops into it, and then carefully replaced the cork.

Poor Kate! No one is at hand to save you from this woman's jealous hate. The poison is deadly potent; was distilled in Italy—that land where the art of secret poisoning is so well understood.

But some one, like an angel of mercy, glides into the room; and, before Lady Ransome is aware of it, her wrist is gripped; and standing there is Hester Routh, her face ghastly with horror.

"Come, you have deceived me!" she whispered, hoarsely. "Would you commit murder?"

Trembling in every limb the wretched woman permitted Hester to lead her out.

"What was that you put into the medicine?" Hester asked, resolutely.

"Let me go. I could kill you, you spy," she hissed, as, wrenching herself free, she sped along the hall, and let herself out of the house.

Dazed, terrified, Hester made her way back to Kate's room and stood transfixed with horror, for her mistress had awakened, and was about to drink the fatal draught.

"Don't!" Hester almost shrieked, and, startled by her voice, Kate let the glass fall to the floor, where it crashed into splinters.

"What is the matter?" she asked tremulously.

"Nothing, madame; I walked in my sleep, I suppose, and woke up all of a sudden. I hope I have not frightened you?"

"Just a little; but what is worse, I have lost my sleeping draught."

"Heaven be thanked for that!" was the silent answer of Hester Routh.

CHAPTER VIII.

"THE Earl of Crondace wishes to see me?" faltered Kate, when Betsy entered with his card, with a hard expression on her honest face.

"Yes, dear; it's some more villainy, I suppose. Take my advice; don't see him, child."

"I must. Oh yes! for my boy's sake!" she pleaded, weakly rising on her elbow, and gazing pitifully up into the old lady's face.

He started with almost remorse as his eyes rested on her; so fragile, so delicate, and yet so lovely, in her very weakness. The white wrapper that enveloped her slender form scarcely vied with her lily-like complexion, heightened by a hectic flush that matched the flots of rose-coloured ribbon that confined her gown.

"Have you come to see the wreck you have made me?" she asked, half scornfully.

"No, Kate. I am sorry you are ill; very sorry. I have come here of my own accord to make reparation for the past."

"You have?" she panted, a delicious thrill vibrating through her heart. "Thank Heaven! thank Heaven!"

"Kate, I am not worthy of your love; forget me. Let our lives be sundered," he said, earnestly.

"You are mocking me, sir; is this your reparation?"

"Listen to me, Kate. I will leave a document acknowledging your son to be my rightful heir."

"How can that be unless I, his mother, am your wife?" she asked, indignantly.

"Why do you not meet me half way? Would you force me into an unlovable life when I offer you your freedom, and your son an earldom? Surely, your revenge is not of a character to refuse such conditions?"

"Do not mistake my motives. My heart is dead to all love for you; only a miracle could revive it. But I owe something, everything, to myself—my womanly honour, my fair name—over which your machinations seek to cast a foul blot. Would you make barter of all I hold most dear, as if it were so much merchandise? My son does not need your permission to inherit what is his by right already. And now shall I tell you what all this means? That woman has sent you here to make these insulting proposals to me."

"No, you wrong her there, Kate. Perhaps, if you knew the true story of her life you would pity instead of condemn her. Years ago, when she and I were boy and girl, we fell in love, and that love grew with our growth, until at last we lived only for each other; but I was poor then, and her parents forced her to marry a man thirty years older than herself. For ten long years she was a good wife to that man, and I can tell you truthfully that she and I never met all that time. His death released her just about the time you and I threw in our lot together."

"You sought me, and by specious arguments and an assumption of love won my heart. Has she any pity for me, knowing what I am to you? Why does she not give you up? The world is large enough for her to select from! I do not know why I argue with you, except it is to bring you to see how cruelly you have treated me. You ask me for freedom. Why? To put another woman in my place; to give her a title which belongs, by your own admission, to me. If she were in my place would she accede to such humiliating conditions? No! and you know it! But you think, because my birth is not as noble as hers, that I must be sacrificed. There is the door, sir. Go, and never enter it again unless you come to offer me a humble apology for all your baseness and insults."

"You defy me, then?" he asked, white with rage at finding himself foiled, where he was assured of an easy victory.

"Defy! why should I? I only claim justice, and will have it at any cost to you or me. I have one faithful friend left, who will stand by me in good or evil report; one, too, I deeply wronged, but whose noble heart has forgiven me."

"Your old lover, I presume?" he sneered; "a mere yeoman."

"Yeoman or not, he would die, rather than

betray a woman's honour. The day may come when you would be glad if he permitted you to call him your friend. I have waited patiently, thinking you would see your folly, but that woman's wiles has cast a glamour over you, and you are blind to consequences."

"You may yet repent your refusal," he said, savagely. "I shall not renew my offer."

"Nor do I wish it; it is idle to talk of peace when there is war in the heart. Go, leave me! I am ill, heart-broken, but not conquered," and she sank back on her pillows with a weary little sigh, and closed those soft grey eyes in very pain, both mental and physical.

But even he was not so black as he painted himself; for that sigh touched his heart, and bending over her, he kissed her hand tenderly, almost reverently, and then rushed from the spot, a prey to keen remorse.

In his blind haste he nearly stumbled against Betsy, who carried little Warren in her arms, intent upon showing him to his artless father.

"Don't be ashamed of your own flesh and blood, if you are an earl!" she said, stoutly, as she held the boy up towards him. "He's as beautiful as a cherubin, and you ought to feel proud of him!"

Taking the little fellow in his arms, who smiled up into his face trustfully, he kissed him thrice, and murmured,—

"Heaven bless you, dear one! May you live to be a comfort to your mother!" and in reply, as if it knew what he said, the child cooed with pleasure, and patted his face with his dimpled fingers.

"Well, I never! Fancy him kissing baby like that, and saying such nice words! Perhaps, after all, they'll make it up, and I'll live to see them happy together. I pray for that every day and night."

Elated with triumph at the success of her manoeuvre, Betsy hastened to tell her mistress the joyous tidings.

"Kissed my darling?" she said, wistfully. "It is the first time, perhaps the last; but I am thankful he has seen him. It may soften his obdurate heart, and help him to fight against the spells of that pitiless woman!"

CHAPTER IX.

KATE soon began to discover that some secret enemy was at work; stabbing her, as it were, in the dark, for all her acquaintances fell away from her; and rumours reached her that some scandal had been set afloat against her character.

To combat with these slanders was not in her power; and she rejoiced when George Osborne, whom she had treated so cruelly, arrived on the scene.

"Why, Kate, how ill you are looking? This trouble is killing you by inches," he said, sadly.

"I shall be better presently, George," she answered, trying to appear cheerful, and forcing back the tears that would well into her gentle eyes.

"Have you done anything with regard to proofs, yet?" he asked, taking her boy on his knee and caressing him.

"No, you see I am so helpless; but now you are here I am ready for anything!"

"Have you seen him since his accident?"

"Yes, only a few days ago he called upon me, and made proposals which I would not accede to."

"Have I your permission to call upon him?" he asked, eagerly. "I might succeed where you a loving, trusting woman, have failed!"

"I fear you might quarrel with him, George."

"That of all things must be avoided."

"I fail to see why we should. As your representative, I should simply ask for an explanation of his extraordinary conduct before appealing to the law."

"He has already explained," she said, with

a sigh. "He loves another, and wishes me to sacrifice myself, my name, my honour, my all!"

"Is the man mad? Does he realize the consequences to himself?"

"Yes, he went so far even as to propose that he should acknowledge my child to be his rightful heir!"

"Why, that is an admission in itself that you are his wife. He must be insane, Kate, although I admit there is a method in his madness. Now, don't be angry if I ask you one question. Do you still love him?"

"Is it possible that I can forget he is the father of my boy, my husband? Sometimes I hate him; at others the old affection pleads for him. He kissed Warren, and spoke kindly of me when he was here last. I have a double duty to perform; to see myself righted, and to save him from the toils of that woman, who even now is plotting to crown me with shame and dishonour."

"My poor Kate!" he said, brokenly. "Heaven forbid that any words of mine should make your cross too heavy to bear. I have come to help you, and I can best do so by seeing him in person. Even now he might relent, and save this unpleasant matter from being dragged before the public."

"I will leave it all in your hands; but, for my sake, avoid any quarrel with him. He is a man whose passion once aroused becomes desperate, reckless!"

"Have no fear. I go simply as your ambassador, and not to avenge any private wrong of my own."

Betsy now entered to take Master Warren away to the nursery, and her kindly face lit up with smiles at Osborne's affectionate greeting.

"I was afraid, Master George, that you would scold me for not taking proper care of her," she remarked. "It is all his doings, not mine. I despise him. Why, lor' bless me, if I was a man I'd go through fire and water to save Miss Kate from even a finger ache; but it will all come home to him someday—mark my words it will."

And to cover her emotion she took the child hastily out of his arms, and beat a hurried retreat.

"I decline to discuss this delicate family affair with a stranger, sir," the Earl said, haughtily.

"I am not a stranger, but an old and valued friend of your wife, my lord," George Osborne said, firmly. "She has no living relative to champion her cause. Surely she has suffered enough already? Her disobedience broke her mother's heart, and your desertion of her at a critical time has quite broken down her health. I look upon her as my sister; we were boy and girl together. Until you came on the scene I had every hope of making her my honoured wife."

"Enough of this twaddle," the Earl sneered, anger flaming into his dark face. "Miss Karson is quite at liberty to marry you to-morrow if she chooses."

"She is too honourable to commit bigamy, my lord," Osborne retorted, passion gradually overmastering prudence.

"You seem to know a great deal of the lady's intentions. Since when did you commence the rôle of carpet knight? I should have thought the plough and harrow would have suited you better."

Osborne winced, and bit his lips at this implied insult, and a greyiness stole into his honest face.

"My lord, I promised your wife to keep my temper, and my promise is my bond; but you are trying me too far. Would you have her utterly defenceless, and at your mercy? How can she trust you after what has happened? Her father was a gentleman by birth and education—she is your equal."

"Insolent clown!" cried the Earl.

But the words had scarcely left his lips than Osborne, enraged past endurance, felled him

with a blow straight from the shoulder, saying savagely,—

"You dastard! you betrayer of innocent women! You have to deal with a man now—an Englishman—who takes an insult from no one, not even from a peer!"

Rising with an awful scowl, the Earl rushed to the door, and was about to look it, with murderous intent, fully resolved that neither he himself nor his assailant should leave the room alive until the insult was wiped out when, on the threshold, he met Lady Ransome face to face.

"What is the meaning of this, Crondace?" she asked in alarm.

"Meaning! Simply that this fellow has dared to strike me in my own house! A pretty agent for the would-be Countess of Crondace to send to plead her cause!"

"What else could you expect from such a person?" eyeing Osborne disdainfully.

"At all events, madam, such people as I do not wish to break a solemn engagement, or to trample on a defenceless woman! I am ready to answer for what I have done either here or before a court of law. I came here with the very best intentions. I leave, telling you that I will use every effort to checkmate a vile conspiracy by obtaining proofs of the marriage. You wish for war, and war it shall be!" With head erect, and eyes flashing with scorn upon the pair George Osborne left the house, literally shaking the dust off his feet as a testimony against them.

"Now, Crondace, are you convinced of the fatal mistake you made in connecting yourself with that woman and her low-bred set?"

"That blow burns into my flesh like a red-hot iron—only blood can wipe it out!"

"Crondace, you forget that any ruffian can insult a lady or gentleman; so can a horse or any animal kick, bite, or slay without it being thought an extraordinary occurrence. Treat the fellow as you would a mere brute. You would be unwise to look upon it as you would a blow dealt by an equal. Contempt is the best weapon with which to attack such canaille."

At this juncture the footman knocked at the door, and said,—

"My lady, a person named Hester Routh wishes to see you on important business."

"Me!" she faltered in dismay, with a guilty conscience making her a coward. "Tell her I am particularly engaged."

"It matters not, my lady. I am here, and must speak with you," cried Hester, forcing her way past the man.

"How dare you presume to follow and intrude here?" Lady Ransome demanded, angrily.

"If I cannot see you privately I must see you where I can. I am suspected of —"

"Crondace, kindly leave me alone with this person," Lady Ransome interposed hastily. "I regret she should have had the audacity to seek an interview with me in your house."

He assented with a bow, and when mistress and servant were alone, the former, clutching Hester by the wrist, said,—

"What is the meaning of this—are you mad?"

"Yes! with terror. You ought to be the last to speak unkindly to me. One word would ruin you, Lady Ransome. Let me go: I am not to be trifled with."

"What has happened?" her ladyship asked, obeying Hester's command. "Is that woman dead?"

"No! but the poison you put in the medicine has been found out, and suspicion falls upon me."

"Impossible!" she gasped, tottering to a chair.

"I thought all was safe when she dropped the glass, but it appears that she had not poured out all the draught. What remained was mixed up with a fresh supply; and, although it has not killed her, she is very ill. She saw me on that awful night after you had gone."

"Had she died what would you have done?"

"Denounced you!" she said, with fierce energy. "I am not going to be branded as a murderess to please you. My character is ruined as it is. The matter will be placed in the hands of the police, and they will find out that I was last in your service, and that my references were false. What is to be done?"

"Let me think!" Her ladyship pleaded pale to the very lips at the awful consequences which stared her so ruthlessly in the face.

Then, after a pause, during which the dropping of a pin might be heard, she said,—

"Hester, you must leave England as quickly as possible. Meet me within the hour at St. Pancras Station, when I will give you a sum of money. You must do this for your own sake as well as mine. Don't hesitate, or you are lost!"

When Hester had gone, Lady Ransome said, by way of explanation to the Earl,—

"It was only one of my maids, who is a little flighty in her head. I am sorry if she has caused you any annoyance."

That night Hester Routh bid good-bye to England, and started for America, bearing in her bosom a weighty secret; and once more Kate's rival was left in possession of the field to plot and plan against her.

Hester's statement about the poisoned draught was too true. Owing to neglect on the part of some one in the chemist's employ the phial was not washed out, hence the almost catastrophe.

CHAPTER X.

"DETECTIVE PRATT, from Scotland Yard!" gasped Lady Ransome; a ghastly hue stealing into her face.

"I will see this man, Bertie!" exclaimed the Earl, who was seated, reading a book of poems.

"No, no!" she cried in terror, and trying to rise.

"I say yes!" he persisted, in a firm tone that brooked no refusal, adding,—

"There is nothing to be alarmed at, my dear Bertie. I expect it is only some trivial business connected with one of your servants."

Turning to the man he said, "Show Mr. Pratt in here."

"I say no!" she almost shouted, "I cannot, will not, see this person."

But before her command could be obeyed Inspector Pratt was at the door, and, without leave even, entered the room. There was nothing in his appearance to cause alarm to any one, for his was a good-humoured, smiling face.

"I beg your pardon, sir, and yours, my lady; but mine is business which is rather important. I have ascertained that a young woman, by name Hester Routh, was in your service for some years."

"What has that to do with me?" she said, acidly, regaining a portion of her usual composure.

"I beg your pardon, my lady; but she is wanted on a serious charge—one of attempted murder!"

"I fail to see what Lady Ransome has to do with the actions of her late servant," the Earl interposed, somewhat haughtily.

"That's what I'm coming to, sir!" the inspector said, unabashed. "Is this your handkerchief, my lady?" holding up a piece of delicate cambric with her crest and initials embroidered in one of the corners.

"Yes," she said, carelessly, "and was no doubt pilfered by her."

"Excuse me, Lady Ransome; but are you acquainted with Mrs. Lonsdale, of Kensington?"

It was the Earl's turn to start now. This was a revelation to him, and it flashed through his mind that Hester Routh was the woman

who had interrupted her ladyship and him by her unwarrantable intrusion.

"I called there once, and once only," was the guarded reply. "During the illness of my friend, the Earl of Crondace, this gentleman," motioning towards him.

"Have you any idea of Hester Routh's whereabouts, my lady?"

"No; how should I?" she answered. "Servants come and go without exciting anything but a passing interest in the minds of their employers."

"Who has been poisoned?" the Earl asked, uneasily.

"Mrs. Lonsdale, my lord!"

"Has she any suspicions herself?" he pursued.

"None, my lord! But I have; and that woman must be found. She has eluded us up to now, but we hope to soon track her down. Mrs. Lonsdale has offered a reward of two hundred pounds for her apprehension!"

The astute officer kept back one important fact, which was that Kate really suspected Lady Ransome; but, of course, this was *entre nous*, and he was too prudent to show his hand to a possible adversary.

"This is a mysterious affair!" remarked the Earl. "What motive could a mere servant have to attempt to poison her mistress?"

"It may turn out that she was an accomplice of someone else, my lord!" the inspector remarked, turning his face from her ladyship, whose eyes were bent on him as if to read his very soul.

"Have you any clue to that fact?" put in his lordship.

"We hope to very shortly unravel the whole skein," the officer said, quietly. "We thought, perhaps, her ladyship might have assisted us in our inquiries, or I should not have troubled you. There is one more question, my lady. I would like to be enlightened on. When did Hester Routh leave your service?"

"Really my memory is very bad for dates," she protested, nervously.

"I can inform you, my lady! It was on the third of October last; and she entered into Mrs. Lonsdale's service on that same date with a character from another lady."

"What if she did?" she asked, with asperity, throwing down the gauntlet of defiance at her tormentor.

"Simply, my lady, that it strengthens certain suspicions. But I will retire, with thanks for your assistance so far!" this with a significant irony in his well-trained voice, which did not escape the Earl, and caused Lady Ransome to bite her lip to hide her emotion.

Scarcely had the firm tread of the police officer died away when the Earl burst out vehemently,—

"Lady Ransome, you are that woman's accomplice!"

"How dare you make such a vile accusation?" she demanded, angrily.

"Because it is true, and you know it, or why did that wretched woman dare to follow you to my house the other day? I warned you against such insane folly as this. Should that infamous woman be arrested she will turn queen's evidence, and I as well as you will be dragged into the question. I must say that appearances would be very black against us."

"Is this the way you pay my devotion?" she asked, reproachfully. "Why are you ready to believe me guilty on mere suspicion? Doctors and chemists have made fatal mistakes before to-day."

"Then, why has Hester Routh absconded?" he asked, piteously.

"Because, being weak-nerved, she dreaded even suspicion, and took to flight; besides, I believe Mrs. Lonsdale guilty of any meanness against you or me. Why should she not have put the poison into the draught herself? If I had done so she would not now be alive to tell the tale. She hates you, and fears and detests me. What more likely than she should try to strike us down with the same blow?"

"I dare not believe her guilty of such infamy," he protested, warmly.

"And yet you accuse me openly of a crime you think her incapable of. Truly, you are gallant, chivalrous to one whose only fault has been that she loved you too well."

"I am distracted," he cried, pacing the room. "What is to be done? Must your name and mine be dragged before the world? By Heavens! I would rather die by my own hand!"

"I am only a weak woman, and yet I am braver than you, Crondace. Let us wait; Hester Routh may never be found. They would not dare, even though they are vindictive, to charge me with such an act simply because she obtained, for reasons of her own, a character from some one else."

"Which must have been a written one," he suggested, warily.

"Of course," she assented, off her guard for the moment.

"Then you were a party to the plot, and for what purpose?"

Perceiving it was useless to fence with him further, she made a virtue of necessity, and said,—

"I but only wanted her as a spy, nothing further."

"I am very sorry to hear this. You ought to have consulted me first. How is it possible to fight our battle with such weapons as espionage and murder, when at the first alarm discovery and detection follow instantly? It is mere reckless folly, and invites defeat, dishonour, disgrace?"

"These are hard words, Crondace!"

"But true, too true. Heaven send us safely out of this gross, fatal mistake of yours. I may have wronged her, but would not injure a hair of her head, even to gain you. Do you understand me, Bertie?"

"Yes, oh, yes! You speak very plain, Crondace. Your love is cool, calculating; mine is a torrent, sweeping every obstacle out of its path, crushing when defied; hoping against hope, ready to do, to dare—to die."

He shuddered visibly as he looked at that face, beautiful even in its demoniac expression, and repented him that he had raised up such a Nemesis as her.

"Good-bye, Bertie! I am off!"

"Where?" she asked, plaintively. "Why say that terrible word 'Good-bye'?"

"Because I am sick of town," he answered, moodily.

"And you would leave me here alone?"

"Yes, for a time. Take my advice; quit England. Abroad you may reflect upon the folly that has nearly wrecked our lives."

"Then you will not do battle with her, but give in like a beaten cur, and acknowledge her as your wife?" she cried, furious with rage and jealousy.

"I did not say that. While we are together we act as flint to steel. I have no wish to figure as a criminal."

"Coward! poltroon!" she hissed, savagely, when he had left her. "It was for you I passed sleepless nights and wretched days; but I will not be trampled upon. If I cannot be your wife she shall not have that honour. I would kill her first!"

Oh, jealousy! what art thou? The passion which curdles the milk of human kindness within the heart; that changes the pure and wholesome blood to gaul; and like the deadly upas tree, scatters desolation where nature had designed the sweetest flowers to bloom.

For two whole days a storm raged through many parts of England.

In London, the parks and squares were strewn with dismembered limbs of the very finest old trees. Roofs of houses were lifted like a hat from a man's head; tiles ripped up, and chimneys blown flat, so that the air was fairly thick with bricks and slates, and a good deal of mortar.

A bull came at last, followed by a wondrous transformation of the land.

The roads were glazed like porcelain; the rugged fences were inflamed with icy enamel, the windows veined like alabaster; every sprinklet of grass was bending beneath the weight of a pendant diamond; and the parks were gloriously decked in all the white witchery of frost upon laces, such as the looms of Brussels and Mechlin could never hope to rival.

Even the sky was full of delicate pencilings as the bleak sun came in flashes through the curling clouds, and softly outlined them one against the other.

It was about this time that Kate received a letter from George Osborne, with the cheering news that after weeks of research he had obtained proofs of the legality of her marriage, and would be on his way home with them on the following day.

"Of what use are proofs?" she thought, sadly, "when I have never held his love. If it were not for my boy, I would willingly go away to some far distant land, and forget the mad dream of my girlhood's days. How noble George is to battle in my behalf, and to discover that which crushes his hopes for ever!"

But on the following day she received a telegram, telling her that Osborne had been seriously injured in a railway collision, and was lying at a village called Burnt Oak, close to Chester.

"Why, this is more than cruel!" she wailed; "just as victory has crowned his efforts. I must go to him at once. Is this a coincidence or what?—that he should be lying close to my husband's estate, and he is there now, for it is announced in the *Morning Post*. Now, Richard Lonsdale, you will be brought face to face with stern facts! I will compel you to acknowledge me, and then part for ever!"

A fierce exultation had taken possession of her; and she longed to humble the proud and haughty Lady Ransome—to crush her beneath her contempt and ridicule.

Being a woman she acted impulsively, rashly, in writing the following letter to her rival.

"LADY RANSOME.—The time has come at last when I shall compel you to cease all pretensions to the love of my husband, Earl of Crondace. The proofs of the legality of my marriage are forthcoming, and will be in my possession to-morrow at the latest. I am off now to my husband in Cheshire. If you wish to be convinced you can follow me there."

"KATE, COUNTESS OF CRONDACE!"

"She dares to taunt and deride me—she, a woman of the people, to defy me! I will be there, but only to triumph or to die!"

Of the many unwise things Kate had been guilty of this was the worst. It was teasing a deadly reptile, calling down fire from the clouds, inviting a torrent to pursue you, an avalanche to overwhelm you.

She had brooded over her supposed wrongs for years, and nursed an impassioned love for the earl in secret during many weary, hopeless years. At last this terrible reality confronted her, and unhinged her mind, and drove her mad.

Kate's imprudent letter, following so closely on the Earl's accusations and reproaches, was the last proverbial straw; and if murder had taken possession of any of any human being it had of Lady Ransome, who lost no time in taking up Kate's gauge of battle by following her to the spot indicated by her letter.

Kate had also written to the Earl, telling him of the proofs, and of her journey to Burnt Oak.

Little did she dream that within the compass of twenty-four hours events would happen to dwarf others that had gone before in her life of vicissitudes. Whether for good or evil the die was cast, and some of the actors in this strange drama of human actions and motives were to meet in one of those struggles

which sometimes not only decide the destinies of nations, but also of individuals.

Three persons were near the Cottage where George Osborne lay with a broken limb, as if impelled there by the hand of destiny.

Kate had bidden him good-night, promising to see him the next morning, and was making her way to the hotel where she was staying. The road led by a black, silent expanse of water, hemmed in by trees, but surrounded by a close rim of dark-coloured earth, uncovered by any greenness of grass or weed.

Along the brink grew clumps of tall, dark reeds, sighing mournfully as the piercing wind that blew between them.

Suddenly she was confronted by a tall figure clad in black from head to foot.

One glance at her face in the gathering twilight revealed her identity. It was Lady Ransome!

"You bade me follow you here. You see I have obeyed you!" she said, in a portentous whisper, full of venom, hatred and all uncharitableness.

"I will speak to you to-morrow, Lady Ransome!" returned Kate, icily.

"Have you seen the Earl?"

"No, not yet; to-morrow I will."

"To-morrow never comes! Do you think that I who have loved him for years will willingly resign him to you?"

"Let me pass!" This, as the maddened woman caught her by the wrist with a grip of iron.

"Renounce him!" she hissed, her eyes glowing like bright coals, her whole frame quivering with the madness of jealousy which poured through her veins like molten lava.

"Let me go, woman. Would you murder me?"

"Yes, destroy you! crush you and your lying proofs out of my path!"

"Help! help!" shrieked Kate, three distinct times.

A bright flash, and then some dark object bounded forward. Kate was thrust aside, and the steel fell upon the Earl of Crondace, who was on his way to the cottage to see Kate, and arrived at the spot just in time to respond to her cries for help.

"Bertie, what have you done?" he asked reproachfully, as the warm blood oozed from the wound. "You have killed me!"

"No, no, Crondace! my life for yours," she wailed. "See, they come to separate us!" as the sound of hurrying footsteps came nearer and nearer. "See, there is a nice quiet place down in the waters where we can find rest!"

"Oh, Heaven!" he ejaculated, in a frenzy of horror; "this the spot I saw in my dream. Bertie! good-bye, I am dying."

"Back!" shouted the mad woman, as with unnatural strength she lifted the dying man in her arms; and, with a shriek of defiant, mocking laughter, plunged with him beneath the black, silent waters, which closed over them like a dark shroud.

Kate was found insensible, and taken to the cottage hard by, where the news of the terrible tragedy soon spread, and thrilled every one with a nameless horror.

On the morrow the bodies were found, and interred in due course side by side in the quiet little old churchyard.

They had loved each other in life, and in death were not separated.

The proofs were sufficient to establish the rights of Kate and her son, little Warren.

It was many a day ere a smile came into her wan face; but time, that healer of heart-wounds, brought her peace at last as the wife of the noble-hearted George Osborne; and sustained by Betsy's devotion, she could think, without a shudder, of that featureless scene at the black pool, when her lover-husband, the man she had bestowed her virgin heart upon, had given his life for hers, and thus atoned for the past, although he had been drawn down to death's black vault by "A Beautiful Medusa."

[THE END.]

THE GOLDEN HOPE.

—10:—

CHAPTER XXXIX.—(continued.)

THE seamen proceeded to investigate the state of the wounded limb, casting occasionally wondering glances at Mr. Forsythe, who was bending over his young wife, bathing her face with sea-water and chafing her hands.

The result of this treatment was Cecile's speedy recovery.

She moved convulsively once or twice, opened her eyes with a wondering stare upon the strange scene around her, recognized her husband, and won back the memory of her recent peril. With it came a frightened, terrified expression.

"Mamma!" she gasped. "Where is she?"

Mr. Forsythe put his hand over her mouth to prevent the possible utterance of words that might be hereafter remembered against them. At the same time he staggered back, and uttered a groan that attracted the attention of the men who had come to his aid.

"My aunt! Have you seen her?" he cried. "A hundred pounds to the man who saves her! She was swept in-shore by the current! My poor aunt!"

In a moment all was activity and confusion on board the two vessels. Luke Jensen's craft was forgotten, and the boats sailed to the northward of the point, Luke suggesting that the lady had been cast upon it. No trace of her could be found upon the sharp low rocks forming the point, and they moved shorewards.

As they did so, Mr. Forsythe observed at some distance to the northward, under full sail, and disappearing behind a projecting point, a little fishing vessel that seemed to be hurrying out of sight. The next moment it had vanished behind the screen of rocks. A momentary suspicion that it might have been near enough to rescue the Baroness disturbed him, but it vanished when he reflected that there had been scarcely time enough for the craft to attain such a distance since a rescue. An instant later the incident was forgotten.

A brief survey of the coast convinced the party that the Baroness had found a watery grave. Her bonnet and other articles of her outside wearing apparel were found floating over a spot that the sailors called the "Pool," and believed to be bottomless—so at least they superstitiously declared it to be. The boat that contained the rescued ones then set out to carry them back to their place of starting, while the second vessel, with others that had approached, hovered about the "Pool" and shores, in a vain quest for the missing lady.

Cecile crouched down in the bottom of the boat during the return sail, her shivering figure well wrapped in pilot coats, and her face hidden in her hands. What she thought and felt during those moments was known only to herself and One other; but her countenance was almost as ghastly and livid, when she was lifted out upon the shore, as at the moment when Lady Redwoode drifted past her before disappearing from view.

The news of the disaster had preceded their arrival. Groups of fishermen and their families were gathered on the shore. Mrs. Jensen was there, eager and questioning. Renee was there, her only sign of emotion in her black, glittering eyes that gleamed and flickered with their strange light. A stranger was there too—Mr. Kenneth, who had just arrived from Redwoode with a message to the Baroness, that Hellice had been partly traosed, and that hopes were entertained of discovering her whereabouts very speedily. He had been met at the very doors of Sorel Place with the tidings of a disaster, and had come down to the beach to greet his loved and honoured mistress.

He had no doubt of her rescue.

He saw Cecile lifted out, haggard and almost fainting; he beheld the dripping figure of Mr. Forsythe, the burly form of Luke Jensen, and he pressed forward to offer his assistance to the Baroness. A look of agonized questioning convulsed his face as he saw that she was not there. With a frenzied cry, he clutched Mr. Forsythe's arm, and said,—

"Lady Redwoode! Where is she?"

"Dead!" answered Mr. Forsythe, hollowly.

"Drowned!"

Mr. Kenneth recoiled from the young man as if he beheld in him her ladyship's murderer.

"Dead!" he shouted. "It is not so! It cannot be! She has been picked up! She has drifted on some shore! A thousand pounds to the man that finds her!"

Mr. Forsythe and his bride did not linger on the beach. In company with Renee, Mrs. Jensen and her son, they walked back to Sorel Place, though Cecile tottered rather than walked. Here restoratives were applied, and the jubilant Hindoo whispered to her young mistress of wealth and grandeur, and the colour came gradually back to Cecile's cheeks, and the awed and horrified expression faded out of her eyes.

Meanwhile, Mr. Kenneth made every effort to recover the body of the Baroness, for, on visiting the scene of the disaster, he had become convinced that Lady Redwoode must have been drowned. The seamen confirmed this opinion, relating instances of fishermen who had been wrecked on those fearful rocks, but who had not survived to tell their tale. They told harrowing stories about the "Pool," and asserted that it was useless to seek to wrest from its depths the bodies of those unfortunate enough to be engulfed therein, for the "Pool" never gave back its dead!

"All day long the heart-broken old man searched and searched in vain. At night he came to Sorel Place, bowed and sad, his once rosy face so full of deep lines that looked like scars, that even his sister could not have known him.

The next day he resumed his vain and useless search, and when the second night came all hope was gone. He believed his honoured friend sleeping beneath the waves, and all the light seemed gone out of his life, all buoyancy from his heart.

Of those who knew her fate, he alone truly mourned her.

On the third day, Mr. Forsythe, Cecile, Renee, and Mr. Kenneth, journeyed back to Redwoode. They all wore mourning, but Cecile's was deepest, as her grief was lightest. Instead of grief, she carried with her a load of remorse that looked like the very grimness of despair.

The story of Lady Redwoode's death by drowning had preceded them.

Telegraphic announcements had been made to that effect throughout the country, and notices had been published in various journals already.

Redwoode looked gloomy and dreary in the light of the dying summer day. It seemed to have lost much of its grace and beauty with the absence of her who had lighted up its grand old halls, and a strange sombreness appeared to have settled down upon mansion and wood, parks and grove.

Cecile felt chilled to the heart as she crossed its threshold and beheld the rows of sad-faced, mourning servants; but the next moment the chill had yielded to a glow, and a thrill of exultation filled her soul as she realized her altered position.

She had gone away uncertain of her future, in some measure a dependent. She had returned as the mistress of Redwoode—as the owner and mistress of all this proud domain!

CHAPTER XL.

Let it work—

For 'tis the sport, to have the engineer
Hoist with his own petard; and 't shall go hard,
But I will delve one yard below their mines,
And blow them to the moon. —Hamlet.

THE time dragged heavily to both Mr. Anchester and his housekeeper until the arrival of the minister for whom they had sent.

The former lingered alternately by the side of the sleeping Hellice, feeling her pulse and listening to her breathing, and on the portico listening for the sound of the returning chaise.

Mrs. Hartley, inwardly reproaching herself for her treachery to her young guest, did not quit the maiden for an instant. It seemed to be a relief to the woman to hold the pale, inert hand, and to look through tearful eyes upon the statue-like face, which she now and then fancied would never wake to life again.

At last the suspense was ended, and Mr. Anchester came hurrying in with a glowing face, exclaiming,—

"They are coming! I hear the wheels of the old chaise! Get the girl ready, Mrs. Hartley. Cover her face with a veil, or something, and no one will suspect anything wrong."

"But the minister may not have come," suggested the widow.

Mr. Anchester replied by a frown so black that the woman hurriedly arose, and went into an adjoining room, from which she speedily reappeared, carrying in her hands a bridal veil, yellow with age, thin as a cobweb, and very voluminous in its folds. This she attached to the maiden's head, crowning the mockery with a few sprays of flowers which Mr. Anchester brought in from the garden.

"That looks well!" he said, stepping back and surveying the effect. "Nothing could be more bride-like!"

"But she can't stand up, sir," said Mrs. Hartley, nervously. "And she won't be able to make any responses!"

"Then you can make them for her," replied Mr. Anchester, looking fixedly at his trembling coadjutor. "It is too late for you to recede. You do not intend to play me false now, do you?"

His answering gaze appeared to paralyze the housekeeper. His herculean figure seemed to tower up threateningly before her, and she did not dare to contest his will at the last moment.

She faltered out a promise of unhesitating obedience, and he answered,—

"That is well! You shall have a handsome reward for your services, Mrs. Hartley, and Hellice will yet thank you for your kindness. There comes the chaise into the garden. As soon as the minister enters, you had better hasten to unlock the chapel. You and Sandy are to be the only witnesses. Don't admit any of the labourers or their wives."

Mrs. Hartley promised that she would take especial care to execute this command, and Mr. Anchester then hastened out to the portico. The chaise had just drawn up before it, and Sandy was helping out a tall, thin old gentleman, with a bent figure and scanty hair, who seemed the incarnation of benevolence and goodness. Mr. Anchester sprang forward and offered his arm to the new comer, assisting him up the steps carefully, and conducting him into the bright and pleasant drawing-room.

The housekeeper, standing beside Hellice, tremblingly performed an introduction between the two gentlemen.

The minister acknowledged it with a bow and tremulous smile, as he turned his uncertain gaze upon the younger man. Evidently Mr. Anchester's civility had impressed him favourably. He was not used to much consideration from his parishioners, who were mostly rough fishermen, but what they lacked in courtly attentions they made up in honest affection.

He took the easy-chair offered him, and warmed his thin hands over the blaze of the

fire, for his old blood moved sluggishly, and he was cold even on that summer night.

"Mrs. Hartley is ill, I think Sandy said," he remarked, after a brief silence.

"No one is ill at the Rookery, reverend sir," replied Mr. Anchester. "Sandy made a mistake. It is not a dying person you have come to console; but I sent for you to unite two young people in matrimony. This young lady, Miss Hellice Glintwick, and myself, Darcy Anchester, a near relative of the Marquis of Anchester."

The minister looked at the white-robed figure of the maiden for the first time. As the housekeeper had said, his sight was no longer good, and he had been barely conscious of the presence of a fourth person in the apartment. He did not now observe anything peculiar about the young girl. He fancied her unusually modest and retiring—that was all.

"It is a runaway marriage, my dear sir," said Mr. Anchester, with an assumption of frankness. "The young lady is an orphan, but has a cruel guardian, who is averse to her marriage. The Marquis, my uncle and adviser, counselled me to bring her here and be married by you. The Rookery belongs to me now, and it will be through a part of every year the residence of my bride and myself. You will, thus, not only make two hearts happy by your compliance with our wishes, but secure to yourself two parishioners, who will delight to number themselves among your warmest friends."

"You wish to be married at once?" said the minister, thoughtfully. "It will be a very irregular proceeding, sir?"

"But irregular marriages are very common in Scotland," returned Mr. Anchester, smiling. "We shall not mind any informalities. All we desire is to be united. Miss Glintwick, having run away with me, must have the protection of a husband as speedily as possible. Have consideration for her, reverend sir, and for me also, who apprehend the sound of pursuit in every breeze."

This was true enough. Mr. Anchester knew that friendly detectives were in search of Hellice, and he feared that they might trace her and rescue her from his grasp, before he had acquired a right to defy them. This fear had grown into positive dread within the past few hours, and under his blandness and frankness he evinced a nervousness that was almost wildness.

The minister appeared to consider the proposition favourably, and the housekeeper stole out to prepare Sandy for his part as a witness, and to open the chapel for the approaching ceremony. She was absent several minutes, and when she returned she found the gentlemen in friendly converse, the marriage fully decided upon.

Hellice still sat by the fire, her veiled head drooping, and the flowers decking her hair already withering from the extreme heat.

"The chapel is ready, my dear sir," said Mr. Anchester, arising. "We will proceed thither at once, and conclude our very interesting conversation after the ceremony. Come, Hellice, my darling!" he added, drawing the maiden's arm through his, and gently supporting her. "Have no more fears, beloved. All will soon be well."

"Is the young lady ill?" inquired the minister, uneasily.

"No; only somewhat overcome with emotion, sir. Poor child! She feels her present position keenly, and will not be easy until she has a legal right to my name and protection. Be kind enough to precede us to the chapel?"

The minister, suspecting no evil, yet oppressed with a vague sense of uneasiness, went on in advance.

They passed down the portico, and crossed the garden, through a laurel grove, to a lonely chapel that stood beside the road, forlorn and deserted in appearance. It was, however, the occasional place of worship for the few inhabitants of the valley.

Sandy, troubled and anxious, stood on the steps to guard against any possible intrusion into the edifice.

Hellice was borne on quietly, her figure hanging heavily upon Mr. Anchester's arm, but Mrs. Hartley fancied once or twice that the maiden was not so insensible as she appeared. An involuntary movement or two on the part of Hellice attested that the fresh air was rapidly reviving her, but she made no effort to support herself. Mr. Anchester was too elated to even notice these indications of returning consciousness.

The little party passed on, entering the chapel. Sandy moved aside to permit it to pass him, and he then followed, closing the door behind him. The poor lad was evidently in a state of great alarm at the non-success of his friendly warning, and would have made an effort to rescue her himself from her enemy, had he not been in deadly fear of the latter. With a great sigh he crept up the dim aisle behind the party, and took the position assigned him by Mr. Anchester.

The chapel was gloomy enough. Its bare white walls had a strangely blank look in the dim light. The rows of wooden benches, and the great family pew, with its curtains and cushions, were full of deep shadows. Upon the altar burned two waxen candles, but the circle illuminated by them was narrow. It was a strange hour and a strange scene for a bridal, but stranger than either was the immobility and statuesqueness of the young bride in her black robe and white veil. The lights and shadows played fitfully about the five strange figures, making them look weird, strange, and unearthly.

The minister looked earnestly at the maiden, whose face he had not yet seen. It seemed strange to him that she should be supported on either side, but the plausibility of Mr. Anchester had blinded his judgment, and he proceeded with the performance expected of him. He offered a prayer, the length of which greatly chafed the expectant bridegroom, who alternated his glances between Hellice and the door. The simple, earnest invocation concluded, the old minister asked the usual questions of Mr. Anchester, going through the prescribed formula upon such occasions. The young man answered him eagerly and impatiently in the affirmative.

The housekeeper felt the girl's form lean less heavily upon her, and was dimly conscious that the maiden was gathering herself up as if to meet a storm. Looking up quickly and fearfully, she met the gaze of a pair of earnest, indignant eyes that seemed to gleam through the veil and burn her face, so scorching was their fiery light. She uttered an exclamation of dismay, comprehending that the drug had lost its power, that Hellice was awake, active, alert, and determined to protect herself!

The housekeeper's cry was scarcely heard, for the minister had lifted his voice in questioning the bride.

There was a brief silence after, the housekeeper not daring to make the responses as she had been commanded, and Mr. Anchester glowered angrily upon the trembling instrument of his will.

"Speak!" he hissed, under his breath. The minister repeated the question, wondering at the delay of the bride in responding.

Then came the answer—not in the feigned voice of the housekeeper, but in the clear, ringing, indignant tones of Hellice herself.

The weak figure straightened herself, the clinging arms spurned the support of Mr. Anchester and the housekeeper. Hellice stood up straight as an arrow, and dashed aside the veil from her white passionate face. How superb she looked in her lofty scorn, her haughty disdain of the creature at her side. She looked at his face with a lightning glance, and then turned to the bewildered old minister, and said, with the look and air of a queen:

"You ask me if I will marry this man. I answer, No!"

And then, with a swift, impetuous move-

ment, she tore off the veil, and flung it at Mr. Anchester's feet.

He stood dumb, appalled. And then, without another word, with only a grateful, kindly look to the joyful Sandy, the maiden turned and walked down the aisle with imperial grace, and with leopard-like swiftness passed out of the door.

No one offered to detain her. No one dared to do so.

For a moment or more Mr. Anchester remained transfixed to the spot, completely thunderstruck at the turn affairs had taken. He stared helplessly from one to another, from the half-fainting widow to the grinning lad, and from him to the minister, who had seated himself weak and trembling, vaguely conscious that he had been called upon to enact part in an intended crime. Then, recovering his energy, Mr. Anchester uttered a terrific oath, and started abruptly in pursuit of his bride.

He had taken but a step or two when he halted and exclaimed hastily:

"Be kind enough, reverend sir, to remain here until my return. I will bring the young lady back immediately. She is subject to these vagaries. Her mind is not quite right, but the ceremony must go on, sir. We are already half-married, you know!"

Without waiting for an answer, he dashed down the aisle and out of the chapel, making his way into the road.

Here he paused a moment, looking up and down the open space with frenzied gaze. In the direction of the Rookery he caught sight of something that looked like the fluttering of a woman's drapery, and he started in that direction with the speed of a deer-hound.

The fluttering drapery moved on before him with the lightness of a thistle-down. It was considerably in advance of him, and maintained the distance between them.

It was lost to his sight at that point of the road where the shadows of the laurel-grove lay thickly, but speedily reappeared beyond, passing along the grounds of the Rookery, and then disappearing within the gates belonging to the Rookery garden.

It belonged unmistakably to Hellice, and she had evidently gone back to the old mansion.

Mr. Anchester could have shouted in his joy at this discovery. He believed the maiden to be bewildered, not yet entirely recovered from the power of the drug she had taken. She had sought refuge in the very snare of the spoiler. She would yet be his prey.

"She fancies she will be safe there," he muttered to himself, as he hurried on. "She has perhaps gone there only to obtain her property! She will not get away from me the second time. By heaven! I will force more of that drug upon her, and carry her back to the chapel. That old dotard shall marry us. I stake my life on it!"

He spoke savagely, and his face glowed fiercely and redly, and his breath came in gasping puffs. He could not sustain the chase so well as the object of his pursuit. His heavy frame and abundant flesh were burdens to him, while Hellice had moved with unvarying lightness and rapidity. Long before he reached the garden-gate his speed had greatly relaxed, and his movements had become blundering and uneven.

The gate was shut as he came up; he paused before it, and leaned against the high stone wall, resting and looking back, believing that he heard steps in pursuit. His suspicions were correct. Sandy was flying along the road after him, and behind the half-witted lad came Mrs. Hartley, frightened into a state of mind little superior to that of her servant.

In the distance was seen the good minister, walking as fast as his strength would permit, and two or three labourers and their wives were also approaching, curious to learn the cause of the singular and unusual disturbances at that hour in their lonely valley.

Mr. Anchester became furious.

Rage against the innocent maiden who had

defeated his schemes filled his soul. He swore to take her back and marry her within the hour. He lifted the latch of the gate, muttering fearful oaths, but the portal would not open to his touch. It was securely locked and barred from within.

Hellice had been wiser than he thought.

"Curse the girl!" he shouted, with the fury of a demon. "Here, you rascal!" and he made a commanding gesture to the approaching Sandy. "Hasten those men yonder, and help me beat this gate in! Do you hear?"

Sandy was obliged to obey. The labourers quickened their steps, and, unheeding the fearful remonstrances of the housekeeper, a vigorous assault was made upon the stout oaken gate. Heavy stones and a wooden bar found in the vicinity were brought into requisition, and plied heavily to remove the obstruction. No one dared to gainsay Mr. Anchester's commands.

The valley labourers recognized him as their master, and dreaded to offend him, lest he should expel them from their humble homes. The good old minister was horrified at the unbridled temper of the baffled adventurer, and stood apart, looking upon him with awe and fear, and only praying that the maiden might defeat her enemy.

The gate soon gave way at the hinges before the determined assault of the besiegers, and with a fierce yell of exultation Mr. Anchester sprang into the garden.

At the same moment, however, something suddenly arrested his movements and held him, spell-bound.

While Mr. Anchester stood gazing, and the other members of the group crowded up behind him to look also, the window of Hellice's chamber was thrown up, and she stood before them. It was Hellice herself, not the helpless, unconscious maiden of a few minutes before, but with a bright and mocking face, all sparkle and animation, all life and beauty, grace, radiance and witchery.

The sight of her thus almost paralyzed Mr. Anchester. He had expected to find her cowering and weeping in an inner room. To see her thus bold, mocking and defiant, was almost as heavy a blow as the one she had dealt him in the chapel.

"I am sorry for the necessity that has compelled me to be so inhospitable, Mr. Anchester," she said, in pure, clear, ringing tones, sweeter than Christmas chimes, yet full of mockery. "It was very painful to me, of course, to shut you out of your own garden. And truth compels me to say that the house is much better barricaded than the gate was. Come in—if you can!" and she bowed in mock courtesy. "I shall be happy to welcome you to my retreat. Don't hesitate through motives of false delicacy, I entreat you. Come at once, and don't stand upon the order' of your coming, to paraphrase a poet. And, by the way, just to encourage you, my dear Mr. Anchester, let me tell you that I was not quite so helpless as you fancied, when you took me to the church yonder!"

With a clear, sweet laugh, full of girlish delight at her position as mistress of the affair, Hellice retreated from the window, closing it securely.

"To the main door!" shouted Mr. Anchester, hoarsely, almost frantic with rage at his discomfiture, fancying that the men were laughing at him and secretly sympathizing with his escaped victim, and thoroughly aroused to the necessity of capturing the girl without further delay. "Bring anything you can to batter the door in!"

The labourers rushed in various directions to procure the necessary articles for the siege. Sandy crept away into a thicket, that he might not be compelled to render his services.

"Mrs. Hartley," said Mr. Anchester, briefly and sternly to the weeping housekeeper, "keep an eye on the minister! Don't let him leave the place until this business is concluded! The marriage-ceremony shall be performed to-day, even if I have to burn the Rookery to

the ground to obtain possession of this demon of a girl; She shall smart for this yet—curse her!"

"But Mr. Anchester," cried the woman, wringing her hands, "you said Miss Hellice loved you! If I had suspected the truth, I would have set her free hours ago. Poor young creature! Have pity on her, Mr. Anchester. For mercy's sake—"

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Anchester, his brows blackening like clouds charged with thunder-storms. "Do as I bid you, and mind your own affairs!"

"I will stay without being watched, my good Mrs. Hartley," said the old minister, gently, and with an expression of terrible anxiety. "It is my duty to protect this poor young girl from this leader in iniquity. I will protect her with my life. So young, so lovely, in such fearful peril—Heaven guard her in this hour of danger!"

Mr. Anchester neither heard nor heeded the good man's closing sentences.

The labourers had returned with instruments that might serve as battering rams, and he led them to their work at once. The main door was chosen as the theatre of operations. The windows were all too high from the ground to be successfully attacked, protected as they were by heavy wooden shutters. The back doors were equally heavy with the front, without having such broad porticoes to serve as standing-places for the besiegers. The main door was immensely heavy, provided with strong hinges, double locks, and two wooden inside bars, but Mr. Anchester did not despair of breaking it in.

Under his directions a very Babel of sound arose from hammers, stones, and wooden bars. The men dared not do otherwise than work lustily, and Mr. Anchester was not less active than they. At a little distance on the lawn stood the minister and the housekeeper, the one calmly praying, the other moaning and wringing her hands. Sandy peered out from his thicket, his teeth chattering, his eyes dilating, and his face white with woe.

Hellice did not again show her face. Nearly an hour was swept in vain attempts to break in the door, and Mr. Anchester at last shouted:

"An axe! Bring axes, you rascals! It would take a week to beat the door in! Fetch hatchets and axes!"

These instruments were speedily forthcoming, and brought into active use. The splinters flew in every direction. The hard, old wood for a long time resisted the strokes of the axe, but at last a breach was made, sufficient to admit a hand. Mr. Anchester thrust in his, pushed up the stout bars from their sockets, and the door was soon broken in.

With a savage yell he sprang into the dwelling, bidding the men guard the door against the maiden's escape. He rushed upstairs to Hellice's chamber.

The young girl was not there! Not in the chamber, nor the adjoining rooms, not in the drawing-room or dining-room, not upstairs nor downstairs, nor anywhere within the house! Mr. Anchester discovered a back window unfastened, and the conviction forced itself upon his mind that she had made her escape by that aperture more than an hour before, and that she had been flying exultantly away from the Rookery all the time that he had been so vainly and uselessly besieging it!

For some time he was literally speechless, but when he gained command of his voice at last, it was to order his men to a thorough and instant pursuit of the fugitive!

CHAPTER XLI.

Our dangers and delights are near allies;
From the same stem the rose and prickle rise.
—*Allyn.*

As we have stated, Hellice made her escape from a rear window of the Rookery at the very moment her enemy began his vigorous

assault upon the front door. She was cool, clear-headed, and self-reliant, in the full possession of all those powers so necessary to her self-preservation. After making her mocking speech at the window, she withdrew into her chamber, gathered together the few possessions she had brought with her, took her shawl on her arm, and, lamp in hand, rapidly descended the stairs, making her way to the dining-room. Here she paused to collect a few articles of food, which prudence warned her she might require, and to drink a glass of generous wine, which effectually dispelled any languor that might have remained from the drug she had taken. As she replaced the glass upon the buffet, there came to her ears the sounds of vigorous pounding and angry command.

"Mr. Darcy Anchester has a task before him that will employ the greater part of an hour at the very least," she said to herself, with a bright and mocking smile. "By the time he effects an entrance I must be very near the station. At any rate, I must have secured my safety!"

She extinguished the light of her lamp, and proceeded quietly through the housekeeper's room to the kitchen. The windows of this latter room were all rather high from the ground, but Hellice's quick wit was ready to supply all deficiencies. She raised the sash cautiously, looked out, perceiving that no one was in the rear garden, and then carefully lowered out a short step-ladder, usually employed by the housekeeper in reaching otherwise unattainable jars at the top of her closets.

The ladder dropped into a thicket of rose-bushes, but found a firm foothold. The maiden then crept through the window, descended to the ladder, and made her way in safety to the ground.

Her first movement was then to drag the ladder to some distance, and conceal it in the midst of some shrubbery. Her second was to plunge through the dark laurel grove, through fields and pastures, until she had gained the road at a point nearly a mile distant from the Rookery, and beyond the rounds of assault; then she sat down by the roadside, under a tree, to decide where she should seek shelter.

She was flushed and excited; her pulse beat quickly, and her heart throbbed like the sound of a muffled drum. She wiped her heated forehead, and gave herself up to quick, calm, clear thought.

She believed Mr. Anchester's assertion with regard to the pursuit of unfriendly detectives, and her first decision was to avoid the railway station nearest the Rookery, lest an officer of the law should be waiting for her there—of any other village or station in the neighbourhood, or within many miles, she was profoundly ignorant. She could not appeal to any of the cottagers for protection. To seek shelter in their homes, at the hands of their wives, would be simply useless. No one who owned Mr. Anchester as master would dare to play him false. Besides, these simple valley-labourers were little better than serfs of the soil. To be expelled from their humble homes would be worse than death to them and their families.

Hellice did not entertain the idea of appealing to them for more than an instant. Clearly she must depend upon herself. She saw no way open to her except to keep to the road during the night, and when morning came to seek at some solitary farm-house a conveyance to some distant town in which she might hide from all pursuit, Mr. Anchester's included. Her purse was well filled; she was young, strong and lithe; and her heart was full of strength and hope. Friendless and homeless as she was, she felt that there were conditions worse than friendliness and homelessness—worse even than a lonely death amid those dreary night solitudes. Better every pang that Fate could bestow than a life as Mr. Anchester's wife—for such a life would be simply a living death!

(To be continued.)

FACETIÆ.

The strongest tie in the affairs of men is a legitimate marriage.

The daughter of Enoch was three hundred and eighty years old when she married. Courage, ladies!

This country is full of men who are self-made. It also contains a good many women who are old maids.

WOMAN (to tramp): "Don't you ever take a bath?" Tramp (sadly): "I ain't got money enough, ma'am, to buy a bathing suit."

MOTHER: "My daughter, if the bad boys try to flirt with you have nothing to do with them." Daughter: "How about the good boys?"

GUEST: "Have you a fire-escape in this house?" Landlord: "Two of 'em, sir." Guest: "I thought so. The fire all escaped from my room last night, and I came near freezing."

"You wouldn't believe me, young man," he said, "if I were to tell you that not a drop of intoxicating liquor ever passed my lips." "Why wouldn't I?" asked the young man; "are you such a liar?"

A NOW-LEGGED man was standing before the fire warming himself. A small boy watched him intently for a while, and then he broke out: "I say, mister, you're staring too near the fire; you're a-warping."

"PLEASE accept a look of my hair," said a bachelor to a widow, handing her a large curl. "Sir, you had better give me the whole wig." "Madam, you are very biting, indeed, considering that your teeth are porcelain."

CLIENT: "Do you always lock your office door when you go out?" Lawyer: "Always. I want to be sure that no blanked scoundrel rummages among my papers until I return." He didn't see how he complimented himself.

A LITTLE bird sat on a bough; Beneath the tree there stood a cough, And close at hand there was a cough. They said: "How happy are we now! We'll all pitch in and have a cough."

The father was winding his watch, when he said, playfully, to his little girl, a bright little six-year-old: "Let me wind your nose up." "No," said the child, "I don't want my nose wound up, for I don't want it to run all day!"

THERE is a little kingdom in the island of Johanna, in the Comoro group. The Sultan boards any ship that may call there and endeavours to secure the washing for his wives, while the Prime Minister peddles coconuts and bananas. There are no Anarchists there. All are poor together.

CERTAIN QUERIES.

Oh! where did the "postage stamp?"

And what did the "Cotton hook?"

Oh! where did the "sugar camp?"

And what did the "pastry cook?"

For whom did the "paper weight?"

And why did the "thunder clap?"

Oh! where did the "roller skate?"

And where did the "ginger snap?"

CHARMING CONVERSATIONALIST. — Watering-place Society. — Young man (to young lady to whom he has been introduced): "You are a daughter, I believe, of Major Mucklehead." Lady: "Yes, sir. Do you know papa?" Man: "Yes." Lady: "I think papa is just splendid." Man: "And you have a brother named William?" Lady: "Do you know brother Will?" Man: "Yes." Lady: "Oh, I think brother Will is just splendid." Man: "Some time ago I met an aunt of yours, Miss Tabitha Thorn." Lady (with enthusiasm): "Do you know Aunt Tabitha?" Man: "Yes." Lady: "Oh, I think Aunt Tabitha is just splendid." A few moments later the lady, while talking to her mother, says: "Mamma, I have just had such a delightful conversation. Mr. W. — is the most charming conversationalist I ever saw."

It is believed that the people who wanted the earth most were those who were caught napping when the flood came.

The asthmatic man, if he is in a good situation, has not half the difficulty in drawing his salary as he has in drawing his breath.

A LITERARY friend of ours, who does much work during the night, says it is absurd to comprehend the average cat and the howling dog under the denomination of "dumb" animals.

ANOTHER friend of the same profession says: It would be a blessed thing if the inspired author of "Curfew Shall not Ring To-night" would write a poem, entitled "Cornet Must not Play To-night," and have it hold good over every night of the year.

A BOOK has been written bearing the peculiar title, "How to be Entertaining Though Stupid." There was no need for the book. The stupid are always entertaining. They listen while the smart talk.

THE boots, stockings, hat, and parasol, says a fashion paper, must hereafter harmonise with a girl's hair. Very good. Hereafter, when we see a pair of caroty boots peeping from beneath a girl's dress, we shall know just what to avoid.

YOU can see multitudes of living things in water, with the aid of a microscope, before drinking it, but there are more horrible things in whisky which are not seen until after you drink it. And that's the difference between whisky and water.

THE most astonishing instance of a man's regard for his word was recently given by a man who killed his wife, whom he did not like. When asked why he did not go off and leave her instead of killing her, he replied that he had promised, on his wedding day, to live with her until death should part them, and that he was not the man to break his word.

A GREAT "revival" has been going on in America. Among the converts was one whose previous profession had been "three card monte." Times being hard, he found little profit in his legitimate profession, and became "converted," as the elders say. One night, at the suggestion of an elder, he rose to edify the congregation with his experience, and thus delivered himself: "Ladies and gentlemen—I mean brothers and sisters—the Lord has blessed me very much. I never felt so happy in all my life (embarrassed); I never felt so happy before in all my life (very much embarrassed). If any one thinks I did, they can get a lively bet out of me."

A VERY deaf old lady, who had brought an action for damages against a neighbour, was being examined, when the judge suggested a compromise, and instructed counsel to ask her what she would take to settle matters. "What will you take?" asked the gentleman in the bob-tailed wig of the old lady. The old lady merely shook her head at the counsel, informing the jury, in confidence, that "she was very hard of hearing." "His lordship wants to know what you will take?" asked the counsel again, this time bawling as loud as ever he could in the old lady's ear. "I thank his lordship kindly," the ancient dame answered, stoutly, "and if it's no ill convenience to him, I'll take a warm ale."

WHY DO WE TOLERATE THESE MEN? — They were walking along the street together, the "funny man" and his friend, and the friend was saying: "Yes, my dear fellow, I greatly admire your little pieces." "I flatter myself," said the "funny man," "that I do get off a fair thing now and then." "Fair thing! Man, your work exhibits genius in every line." They had reached the corner stand of an Italian fruit and nut vendor by this time. "I am glad to hear you say so," said the "funny man." Then he added, "I've got some splendid things for next week." Just then the fruit and nut vendor shouted, as he turned his handle, "Chestrnuts! chestrnuts!" and there occurred a long and painful pause in the conversation.

"WHY, Georgy," said a girl to her little brother, "I've just heard that you were whipped at school last week. I had no idea of it till I was told a few minutes ago." "Haden't you?" returned Georgy; and then he added, with a tone and air of pride: "Why, I knew it at the time."

A MINISTER and a doctor were once arguing as to whether clergymen or physicians are the more useful members of society. The minister said that clergymen are the more useful because they show people the way to heaven. "They may show them the way," said the doctor, "but that would be of precious little use if physicians didn't give them a lift on the journey."

NOT SO BAD, AFTER ALL. — Old Mr. Anjerly, the father of Tom Anjerly, was in Cambridge last week. Tom is a student at the University, and spends a great deal of money in frivolity and wickedness. "Tom," said the old man, "you got a registered letter from me last week containing ten pounds." "Yes, I got it," "I'll bet you have not got any of it left." "That's where you are off. I've got the envelope in my desk now."

BANK PRESIDENT: "Mr. Bullion, I regret to state that I have discovered a trifling deficiency of one hundred thousand dollars in your accounts." Cashier: "I—I—" President: "I have also learned that, although your salary is but three thousand, you have within the past year purchased real estate to the amount of another hundred thousand." "Really, sir, I—" "And I have ascertained that you are going to start for Montreal to-day. Now I have one request to make." "Name it, sir." "Don't go until to-morrow. Give me one day's start." — *American Paper.*

THE DIFFERENCE. — Wife: "John, I know that you have a good heart, but I am sorry to say, you sometimes use very profane language." Husband: "Maybe I do, my dear; but, honestly, I don't mean it. A little mental effervescence, you know. The fact is, my darling, profanity sometimes acts as a moral safety-valve." W.: "Perhaps so." But consider, John, there is my brother Jack, who never used a profane word in his life." H.: I know it, dear; but Jack is a blacksmith and I am a literary man, and he never needed to use a stylograph as I am doing now."

A REMEDY FOR OPHTHALMIA. — Barton had had trouble with his eyes for several days. Much work under a lamp at night had injured them, and the trouble becoming serious, he was obliged to have a bandage put over them and retire into the seclusion of a darkened room to give them rest. Carton called upon him at this critical period, and on being shown into the gloom of his friend's room, inquired: "What's the matter with you, old fellow?" "Blind, my boy, blind." "That's all right," said Carton, producing a bottle from his pocket. "Blind, did you say? Well, here's an eye-opener."

NOT PHENOMENAL.

A PARTY of three gentlemen were conversing at the bar of the Blank Hotel last week, when a seedy-looking fellow entered, and greeted one of the party by name.

"Gentlemen," said he, "let me introduce to you my friend, who served in the war, and survived in spite of the fact that two bullets passed through his stomach."

"Indeed!" exclaimed his companions, with one accord. "Why, that is simply marvellous! Will you take something?"

He would, and after repeating the dose three times at the expense of the party he took his departure.

"Jim," said one of the party to the gentleman who had introduced the man, "how is it possible that he could survive with two bullets through his stomach?"

"Oh, simple enough," was the reply; "you see, he accidentally swallowed two."

And the stillness that followed was only broken by the barman, who said: "Two and two, please."

SOCIETY.

THE Queen has been graciously pleased to accept the dedication of a book about "Old Scottish Communion Plate," which is being prepared for publication. The work is to have a frontispiece portraying the Communion Service given by the Queen to Crathie Parish Church twenty-five years ago. Her Majesty, by-the-bye, attended morning service at Crathie Church a few Sundays ago, to hear the Rev. Dr. Matheson, of St. Bernard's Church, Edinburgh, who was to preach there. These "variety entertainments," of different Presbyters, seem to be to the Lady of Balmoral what more mundane excitements are to her subjects. We trust they do her good.

THE Queen, in common with all the crowned heads of Europe who have sent presents to the Pope on his Jubilee, will shortly receive, in return, a miniature portrait of His Holiness, a number of which he is now causing to be painted.

THE Queen's Jubilee presents, now being exhibited at St. James's Palace, have drawn so many visitors that the rooms containing them have proved much too small to accommodate the crowds of would-be sight-seers, and there is a talk of removing them to some more convenient place. It is to be hoped that when this change of venue has been made an opportunity of seeing them will be given to Her Majesty's more humble subjects, by throwing open the Exhibition for some hours each evening.

HER Majesty's Palaces, including Hampton Court Almshouse, number nineteen, and the annual charges for the same amount to an enormous sum. As the Queen does not occupy one of these, and as she practises economy for her own advantage, it would be only a reasonable demand if we were to ask for the expenses to be reduced for the benefit of the over-burdened taxpayer.

THE Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh, accompanied by their nephew George, rode up from Cattaro last week to Cetinje, where Prince Nicholas of Montenegro gave them a gay reception. The Prince met them with an escort of horsemen in national costumes, and there was a grand firing of salutes, ringing of bells and shouting of assembled crowds as the *cortège* rode along the streets, which were all decorated with floral wreaths for the occasion.

It is reported that the Empress of Austria is to make a stay of some weeks at Miramar, a matrimonial project being reported to be the object of her visit. The Regent of Bavaria is supposed to be desirous of seeing his grandson, Prince Rupert, who is the Heir Apparent to the Bavarian Throne, married to an Austrian Archduchess. His mother is also an Austrian Princess, and half-sister to the Queen of Spain.

The reconciliation of the King of Serbia with Queen Nathalie is now said to be complete; there is even a talk of Her Majesty returning to Belgrade. It is whispered that the results of the recent elections have had more than a little to do with this, a great many candidates with Russian leanings having been selected by the majority of votes, and thus a number of the Queen's partisans having made their appearance in the Serbian Parliament.

MADAME ALBANI appears to be in luck's way, the Queen having presented her with the Jubilee commemoration medal set in diamonds. It has also on the top a diamond star set with sapphires. It is much better to be born lucky than rich, and we have no doubt Madame Albani thinks so.

SINCE Queen Christina returned to her capital she has taken great delight in receiving a visit from her brother, the Archduke Stephen. She went down to the railway station to meet him, and the greetings between brother and sister were enthusiastically affectionate. The Archduke speaks Spanish fluently, and has won all hearts by his affable demeanour.

STATISTICS.

CROWN LIVINGS.—The patronage of the Crown includes 371 livings, the incomes of which average £520 each annually; it has the appointment of all the Archbishops and Bishops and Deans, with the exception of the three Welsh sees of St. Asaph, Bangor, and Llandaff; it nominates all the Canons of Canterbury but two, three Canons of St. Paul's, all those of Oxford but one, and all those of Windsor, Westminster and Worcester. It also disposes of the Mastership of the Temple, &c. The Prince of Wales has twenty livings, of the total value of £6,500, in his patronage. The Lord Chancellor presents to twelve Canonries and 723 livings. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has forty-five livings to give away.

THERE is one thing we could never understand, and that is, who gets the money paid for marriage licenses. One of these precious documents costs at Doctors' Commons, with fees, £22s. 6d. Through a clerical surrogate in the country it varies, according to the diocese, from £2 12s. 6d. to £3 3s.; a special license is more, averaging £29 8s. Even at a Registrar's Office the fees for a license amount to two guineas. Seeing that the Government stamp costs on an ordinary license 10s., and on a special one £5, where does the rest of the plunder go to? The Act of Parliament (4 George IV., cap. 76) "To Avoid Fraud and Collusion in Obtaining Licenses for Marriage," might surely be carried into effect without extorting such large sums of money from those who contemplate matrimony; but then what is to become of Vicars-General, Registrars, Record Keepers, Assistant ditto, Clerks, Deputies, and all the rest of them?

GEMS.

THEN I saw in my dream that it is much easier going out of our way when we are in it, than getting into it when we are out of it.

THE Pythagoreans make good to be certain and finite, and evil infinite and uncertain. There are a thousand ways to miss the white; there is only one to hit it.

HALF the illness and more than half the unhappiness in life comes from the want of some active outside interest—something to take the person out of himself or herself.

THE fortitude of a Christian consists in patience not in enterprises which the poets call heroic, and which are commonly the effect of interest, pride and wordly honour.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

HANGING PICTURES.—Pictures are often hung from two hooks instead of one, to bring the lines of the chord into harmony with those of the walls of the room. It is very difficult to adjust both cords to the same length, but much time and temper can be saved by using a single piece of cord, and passing it behind the picture through both screw-eyes. The proper adjustment can then easily be made by moving to one side or the other.

RICE AND EGGS FOR AN INVALID, GOOD IN SUMMER COMPLAINTS.—Wash a small teacupful of rice, first in cold water, then in boiling water; put this into a saucepan, with two teacupfuls of boiling water, and a pinch of salt. Make this boil quickly, then very slowly, for twenty minutes. Fork up the rice; there will be no water to strain away, the rice will have absorbed it. Take about two tablespoonfuls of rice on a hot plate, and, having poached a fresh-laid egg, lay it on the top of the rice, and serve hot. This food should only be given under medical sanction, as, simple as it appears, it cannot be given to any one of constipated habit.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THERE is nothing—no, nothing—innocent or good that dies and is forgotten; let us hold to that faith or none, says Dickens. An infant, a prattling child dying in the cradle, will live again in the better thoughts of those that loved it, and play its part through them in the redeeming actions of the world, though its body be burnt to ashes or drowned in the deep sea.

AND THE COCK CREW.—Why should cocks figure on the tops of steeples? Christians connect the custom with the reproach the cock once conveyed to St. Peter. But the cock used to be placed on the tops of sacred trees long before it was transferred to church steeples, and in North Germany it still stands upon the May-poles. It was partly a watchman and partly a weather prophet, and by its crowing it could disperse evil spirits and all approaching calamities. Its life was sacred in India and Persia, and Cicero speaks of the ancients regarding the killing of a cock as a crime equal in blackness to the suffocation of a father. Our weathercocks are doubtless the survival of these old ideas.

THE DUST OF POWDER.—As the skin invariably shows the dust of powder, there is not the least deception about it, except from a stage distance. And yet we have seen young girls, whose complexion needed no improvement, applying powder, because they foolishly imagined that there was unnecessary "shine" about the polish which youth alone possesses. Mothers should inquire very closely into the habits of their daughters in all matters relating to the toilet, and see that the hair is cared for, to preserve its luxuriance; the complexion, that it is kept as pure as the heart; the teeth, that they remain sound and white; and the form, that is youthful and erect, be not cramped and deformed by youthful practices. This is a sacred obligation, and the attention of English women is not devoted to this subject to the extent that it should be.

COTTON CROP OF JAPAN.—The yearly cotton crop of Japan amounts to about one hundred and thirty-one million pounds. The manufacture of the staple is of the most primitive description. It is almost entirely a domestic industry, gin, spindle and loom being found in the house of the farmer on whose land the plant is grown, the female members of the house doing the spinning and weaving. The spinning wheel differs in no respect from that used in Japan three hundred years ago, or from that used in England prior to the invention of the jenny, except that the wood is bamboo. The cost of one of these wheels is about nine pence; it will last five or six years, and with it a woman of ordinary skill can earn two shillings per day. Small factories are beginning to spring up, but still the great bulk of the native grown cotton is used in the manner described.

A CO-OPERATIVE KITCHEN.—The time will come when we shall discover at home what we have long ago found out in the factory and the warehouse. The absurd waste of a hundred fires to cook a hundred joints, with a hundred servants to turn the spit, will become self-evident. One large fire or a patent gas stove, and one or two cooks would suffice for all the hundred joints. The same may be said of many other forms of domestic work. A row of houses or flats could, in their collective capacity, well afford to organize a model kitchen, with the most approved modern mechanical appliances. For such a kitchen the meat, etc., could be bought at wholesale, and an immense economy realized all round. On the other hand the cooks and servants could be paid the highest wages, and the best skill demanded and obtained. As for freedom and independence, the servants might organize an "eight-hour shift," and doubtless the more skillful among them would soon realize the workman's ideal of eight hours' work, eight hours' sleep, eight hours' play and eight shillings a day.

